

Christ In Isaiah



A.B.Simpson

Visit WiseBeliever.com for more free Christian Apps, Ebooks and Movies

Christ in Isaiah

by

A.B. Simpson

Chapter 1 – Isaiah’s Call and Consecration

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up.” (Isa. 6: 1.)

The eighth century before Christ gave birth to the most momentous epochs of ancient history. We find in it the eras both of Babylon and Rome, the two mightiest monarchies of the past. It also saw the fall of Israel and Assyria and the decline of Judah until the kingdom at last fell under Gentile sway. Great events are the mold in which great men are developed and the momentous events of this age developed the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, Isaiah.

Before entering upon his writings in detail, we shall look at the frontispiece which appears in the beginning of the volume, a picture of the prophet himself. It is given in the sixth chapter of his prophecies although chronologically it belongs to an earlier date. The story was deferred until for some years he had actually proved in his experience and work the truth of the great commission which had been given to him at the beginning.

The story of Isaiah’s call and consecration is a living picture which speaks to living men today as personally and practically as when it first became true of the great prophet himself. While history changes from age to age, the nature of God and the needs and experiences of human souls are still the same. May it prove to some who read this chapter a similar call and consecration.

I. “In the year that King Uzziah died.” This is not a mere note of time or item of chronology. It suggests a dark background for the picture of divine grace and human consecration which shines out in the story.

The time that King Uzziah died was a very dark one for Judah and doubtless for Isaiah too. He had been the most illustrious of the nation’s rulers since the days of David and Solomon. He had carried

the banners of his country before mighty and victorious armies until every enemy had been subdued and Judah had almost reached the ancient boundaries of the Abrahamic promise and the days of Solomon, and it is, perhaps, not too much to say that the throne had reached a height of power and influence unequaled by any earthly dynasty at the time. At the same time the trade of the country had kept pace with its military advance and wealth, and prosperity filled all the land with patriotic hope and confidence.

Suddenly all this was interrupted by the death of Uzziah. Nor was it an ordinary death, but overshadowed by the most tragic and dreadful accompaniments. It had come as a stroke of divine judgment because of a fearful and presumptuous sin. Swollen with pride and self-sufficiency, he had presumptuously ventured, in defiance of the warnings of the priesthood, to arrogate to himself the functions of the high priest and had dared to enter the Holy of holies to offer incense with his own hands. Instantly the stroke of heaven fell upon his daring head and he came out a leper as white as snow, and sank to his grave with the fearful badge of heaven's most tremendous judgment resting upon him. The effect of such a catastrophe upon the nation must have been overwhelming, and all the excellence of the brief succeeding reign of Jotham was unable to counteract it.

Isaiah had doubtless shared with others the hopes and dreams which Uzziah's glorious reign had inspired. An intense patriot, and, like all great souls, an enthusiast, Isaiah had entered into the hopes and triumphs of his country with deepest ardor. Doubtless, like most young dreamers, he had built a castle of earthly ambition until its towers had reached to heaven, and had dreamed of the grandeur of his country until it seemed to him that the glowing vision that was already burning in his soul of the latter day glory was to be fulfilled before his eyes and in his own lifetime. But the fearful death of Uzziah shattered his idol and rudely dispelled his early dream, and for a time there seemed nothing before him but desolation and despair.

But at last out of the wreck of his earthly hopes, there burst upon his soul the vision of God and the unseen world where he was henceforth to look for the realization of his shattered earthly dreams. While the throne of Judah was tottering, the everlasting throne was forever unmoved. While earthly heroes might pass away, and earthly ideals be shattered in the dust, God remained forever true, and faith only needed to take the highest flight and look for its realization above. "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." Such an experience as this has to come to every great soul before he is prepared to live both for time and eternity and to be a true prophet for God in the midst of all human vicissitudes.

Such a rude awakening had to come to the disciples of the Master as they too dreamed of an earthly kingdom and wondered that their Master would not allow the enthusiastic multitudes to "take Him by force and make Him a king."

Even after His resurrection they still continued to ask: "Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom unto Israel?" Their dreams also were shattered and they saw the Master to whom they looked as the successor of David and Solomon hanging upon a shameful cross and consigned to a dark and dreary tomb. But out of that rose the vision of the resurrection and that greater coming and better kingdom which He is yet to bring.

So, too, most of us begin our work for God with enthusiastic expectations of earthly success and God

has to let us down, as He did Isaiah, until we are prepared to follow the Master outside the camp, to be crucified to earthly honors and triumphs and to look for the realization of our faith and hope in the ages to come.

How often, too, the individual Christian has to be awakened to the vision of God by some such painful shock. You had built your nest securely amid the bowers of love. You had fastened the tendrils of your heart to some sweet face or loved friend; you had dreamed that your security could never be shaken and you had pictured a bright and beautiful earthly future; and lo, instead there came consuming sickness, days and nights of weary pain and the moldering grave. For a while your heart was crushed and your spirit was broken and even life itself had no longer anything in it worth living for. But at last the vision of God began to rise upon your view and the face of Jesus grew real as you looked up through your brimming tears and learned at last that it is only through the wreck of our earthly hopes that we begin to seek the things that cannot pass away, and today, with a chastened peace and a hope that cannot fail, you are thanking God for the day that someone died that you might learn to live.

Or perhaps you had a severer shock, for there is something worse than death. You attached yourself to some human cause, you yielded your confidence and your devotion to some earthly leader. You surrounded him with a halo of your ideals and dreams and you almost worshiped him as God. And then came the rude awakening, the failure of your ideal, the discovery of human weakness, perhaps of sin and shame, and your idol was shattered in the dust and with it all the hopes, ambitions and purposes of your life. Never again would you be deceived into any enterprise of usefulness or service. You had found that “all men are liars,” and you were in danger of becoming cynical and sour and losing faith not only in human nature but in all possible virtue and goodness.

It was then that you found God and learned that there was but one true Leader worth worshiping, but one cause worth embracing, but one life worth living, and today you are patiently, hopefully, victoriously pressing on, gathering out of the wreckage of time all that you can, looking for no perfection here, but laying up the fruits of your service in heaven, and some day expecting the Master to show the finished product and to give to you the glad “Well done” and the great reward. We are not fitted for any earthly ministry until we have seen the failure of life and learned to live for the things that cannot pass away.

Dear friend, look up through your tears and your shattered ideals and idols and see God and begin to live for Him and the things that are above.

II. The vision.

The apostle John tells us that it was Jesus Christ that Isaiah saw in this vision of heavenly glory. “These things said Esaias when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.” This was his first view of that glorious Christ, whom above all other ancient seers he beheld afar off and proclaimed as the Hope of the ages. He saw Him “sitting on a throne high and lifted up.” It was the vision of the heavenly temple with the seraphim or “the burning ones,” His ministers and courtiers.

The expression “high and lifted up” is intended to convey the idea that the God of Isaiah was a very much higher Being than the conceptions and ideals of the people. The God they wanted was a kind of

fetish who could help them in their temporal needs and deliver them from their troubles somewhat as the idol of the pagan was expected to answer to his call and deliver him in his difficulties or be soundly abused for not doing so. That is the idea of God that many people have. This little planet is at the present time the center of His greatest activities and the object of His loftiest plans. He is preparing for the advent of His Son upon this earth and here He is to work out through Him the greatest problem of the universe. His supreme purpose is to fill the earth with His glory and for this consummation, everything in earth and heaven is combining.

This was Isaiah's sublime lesson as he listened to the heavenly song and then went forth to be a worker with God in the great plan of bringing back this revolted planet to its orbit around His throne.

Such a vision must come to us before we are truly prepared for the work of God. Then we too will spring to our places in this mighty plan and instead of dreaming about some far off heaven will begin to work to make this green old earth a heaven below.

The heavenly vision had one lesson more for Isaiah, namely: the pattern of true service. He was to go forth into the work of heaven and God permitted him to see the way His servants yonder ministered at His command. The first thing he would be struck with as he gazed upon them was their deep humility. Of their six wings, two were used to cover their faces, two to cover their feet and only two left for flight. They were veiled workers. Even their own transcendent beauty they covered from the sight of others and themselves, and their work, suggested by their feet, was hidden as soon as it was done and they swept on to new commissions without stopping to reflect on what they had done. What a pattern of true service here! God give us the veiled face and the veiled feet.

But again their wings suggested celerity, swiftness and service. They were ready to fly at God's command and fulfil His messages of love without a moment's delay. True service still will be ever ready for "the King's business requires haste."

The next thought suggested by the vision of the seraphim was worship and praise. Our highest service is to glorify Him. Have we given Him the firetouched lips and is He using them like aeolian harps to respond to His touch and show forth His praise?

III. The shadow of the vision.

The first effect of this vision was another vision that rose like a dark shadow in the background; the vision of himself. In the light of God's glory and heaven's pure service, he could only see his own utter vileness and cry out, "Woe is me for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

The true vision of God always humbles us and makes us loathe ourselves.

The story is told of a little child from the slums that stumbled into a mission hall where a kindergarten teacher was giving an object lesson to the little grimy children of the streets, in the form of a beautiful white lily. Not a word was spoken, but the children were permitted to gaze upon and even touch that spotless flower. Immediately the wondering eyes of one of the little girls fell upon herself, and with a shadow of shame upon her face she swiftly turned and fled from the building, and never stopped until

she got to her miserable garret home. There soap and wash-basin and every little trinket she could find in the way of cleanliness and ornamentation was brought into requisition, and when she returned half an hour later she was transformed. That beautiful lily had shown her herself and had awakened in her a longing for at least external purity. So God reveals us to ourselves.

Has He shown to you the vision, and has it cured you forevermore of ever expecting anything good in that old self, and led you to say, "I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me?"

It is not a good or wholesome thing to be always sitting in judgment upon ourselves in mortification and condemnation. The chagrin and disappointment which we feel, because we expected to find something good in ourselves and have not is oftentimes but the result of pride. True humility, however, has given up self forever, and never again expects to see anything worth approving, but leaving it forever in the bottomless grave of Christ, turns to Him and takes Him and His righteousness as our beauty and our glorious rest. God keep us there.

IV. The cleansing.

"Then flew one of the seraphim unto me having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar, and he laid it upon my mouth and said: lo, this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged."

Thus Isaiah anticipated by eight centuries the glorious promise of John the Baptist and its fulfilment in the story of Pentecost.

If we find no reference here to the atoning blood in the picture of our cleansing, let us remember it is results rather than processes that God is teaching. Behind the fire and the oil we always find the blood in the Old Testament ritual, and the altar here from which the coal was taken suggests the sacrifice which had already been consumed by that altar fire. But the result of Calvary is the Holy Ghost, the baptism of fire that burns up and burns out the life of self and sin and then burns in the blessed image of the Master through the Holy Ghost.

Beloved, have we received that cleansing fire? Thus and thus alone can we be prepared either for holy living or efficient service.

V. The call.

Now comes the call to service. But it was not a call so much as a permission. It was not a command so much as the acceptance of a volunteer. With newly cleansed and quickened ears he was able now to hear what had been unheard before, the voice of the heavens. He seemed to have been brought so very near to the council chamber of Jehovah that he was listening to the counsels of the Godhead as they sadly exclaimed, "Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?" Why did not God say at once, "We want you to go." Ah, this is the very secret of true service. The Old Testament servant was a slave, who went because he was told. The New Testament servant is a son and partner, who goes because his heart prompts him. Isaiah rose to the regal height of New Testament sonship, and without compulsion or command, he asked the privilege of being a worker together with God. The moment he understood the thought of God, the plan of heaven and the desire of those glorious beings who were

filling the earth with His glory, his heart responded, his life was offered, and the glad and willing cry came forth, "Here am I, send me."

In the beautiful story of David we have the picture of a time when he longed that some one would "give him to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate." He did not send any soldier on such a fearful enterprise, but unconsciously the cry came from his heart for a draft of the waters from the well of his childhood. But that was enough for the three brave men that heard his longing, and, dashing through the ranks of the Philistines, came back with their helmets filled with the waters of Bethlehem's well. That was service so sacred that even David could not bear to drink of such a costly draft. That is true service for our heavenly Master. We are kings and priests unto God. It is royal service He wants. The men who go into the ministry because somebody bids them, or because it offers a professional channel for support, are the ecclesiastical flotsam and jetsam of society, and useless to God and their fellow men. The missionary call is the cry of the heart that has heard the heavenly message and "cannot but" go forth to tell the world of His love.

VI. The commission.

His service is accepted, and God says, "Go." But, oh, what a commission! Go, not to triumph, but more frequently to fail. Go, not to be admired and loved, but to be rejected, and at last "sawn asunder." Go, to say, "Lord, who has believed our report?" "All day long have I stretched forth my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Go, not only to a crucified life but to a crucified ministry. Go, to see the nation go down until at last there is nothing left but the very root of the tree, from which the future growth is yet to spring. Go, not to save the nation, but to gather the remnant out from the nation, the one out of ten who will be willing to hear your voice. And he went, and witnessed and suffered and died. But, oh, the resurrection that has come from the seed Isaiah planted in tears and seeming failure!

Beloved, so He is sending us. Let us not look for an earthly future even in our Christian work. Let us be willing to gather "the remnant," to have "the tenth," to save men one by one for that glorious time and that heavenly temple when He shall manifest our work, and we shall find that our labor has not been "in vain in the Lord."

The writer is indebted to a gifted friend for the fine suggestion of the three epigrammatic words that sum up the teaching of this chapter and the story of a true life.

The first word is "Woe," "Woe is me," a vision of self and its eternal renunciation.

The second word is "Lo," "Lo, this has touched your lips," a revelation of God and the cleansing baptism of the Holy Spirit that prepares us for life and service.

And the third word is "Go," a call to service.

Have we gone through these three chapters of Christian life and service and met the "woe," the "lo," the "go," like the ancient prophet of Jerusalem?

Chapter 2 – Sin and Salvation

“Come, now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isa. 1: 18.)

The method of the ancient prophet was very different from a modern literary writer. He did not sit down in his library and calmly dictate his message in flowing periods and paragraphs, but in some public concourse or in the temple court, he suddenly appeared and, with dramatic pose and gesture, poured forth a torrent of vehement eloquence, sometimes of stern denunciation, sometimes of solemn warning, sometimes of tender appeal and expostulation. These were afterwards gathered up and published, not as a series of logical addresses, but with all the dramatic irregularity of their first utterance. They resembled not so much the current of some flowing river pursuing its tranquil course to the sea, but rather were like some volcanic stream rolling down the mountain side, and gathering up in its course the rocks and trees of the mountain, or turned aside in its fiery course by the obstructions that it meets on its way and then sweeping on again in some new channel with its mingled current of lava and earth. While the critical eye would fail to find much logical connection, yet the eye of faith can discern through every prophetic message an unbroken thread of spiritual connection and one uniform message of divine reproof and mercy.

The first chapter of Isaiah was probably the first of the prophet’s public messages, and it is a good sample of many others. It may be described generally as a message concerning sin and salvation. Its form is most dramatic. Suddenly appearing in the temple court or the public square, with impressive gestures he calls the attention of the multitude by repeating the very words with which Moses had begun his last message to Israel. “Hear, oh heavens,” he cries, “and give ear, oh earth, for the Lord has spoken.”

Then he arraigns the nation before the bar of heaven and calls as his witnesses the heavens and the earth and the very dumb brutes of the lower order of creation, whose fidelity to their masters is a silent reproof to the disobedience of God’s people. Then follows the arraignment of the sinful nation as he proceeds to characterize the unnaturalness, ingratitude and fearful wickedness of the people, declaring at last that their wickedness has almost brought them to the condition of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Then there seems to have come some voice of protest or defence from some one in the multitude, calling attention to their costly worship and offerings as a proof of their loyalty to God. But this only calls forth a more vehement denunciation of their wickedness, and the prophet proceeds to tell them that the very worst thing about them is their religion, inasmuch as it is a cloak of hypocrisy to cover their sins, and that their prayers and sacrifices are not only rejected, but are an abomination to God so long as their hearts are corrupt and their “hands are full of blood.”

At last the voice of denunciation is changed to one of mercy. The loving heart of God seems to grow weary of reproof and longs to pour itself out in mercy and compassion. One is reminded of the time when the Lord Jesus Himself on earth had upbraided the cities of Galilee for rejecting His message

and had begun to say to them, “It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which had been done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”

But at that moment the Master’s heart seemed unable longer to endure the pain of His own reproof, and suddenly He breaks out into an appeal of unspeakable tenderness as perhaps He sees in the multitude before Him some weeping face or penitent heart. “Come unto Me,” He cries, “all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

There is a similar revulsion of feeling a little later in His ministry, when after He had pronounced upon the Pharisees the fearful woes of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, He suddenly pauses again and breaks out with an appeal of divine compassion, “Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone them that are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered you together, even as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not.”

Such a change comes over the prophet’s message here. Suddenly his denunciations close, and turning to the people with tones of tenderness he cries, “Come now and let us end our reasoning; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool; if you be willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and revolt, you shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.”

I. Sin.

The prophet gives us a graphic picture of sin and its aggravations.

1. It is contrary to nature. The very heavens and the earth are appealed to against it. The stars in their course follow the laws of nature. The earth pursues her orbit in obedience to the great principle of gravitation. There is harmony everywhere in the material universe and the slightest breach of law brings collision, confusion and destruction. Man alone defies the laws of his being and the will of his Creator and involves himself in catastrophe and destruction. The mute creatures of the lower orders of animal life are appealed to against us. “The ox knows his owner,” and patiently and obediently follows the furrow and goes to the altar of sacrifice without a murmur. The ass, usually accounted foolish and obstinate, knows at least where its fodder is found and finds its way to its master’s crib rather than to the weeds and thistles of the wilderness.

Man alone turns away from the true source of all his supplies and blessings and “hews out for himself broken cisterns that can hold no water.” The stupendous folly and unnaturalness of human sin is vividly brought out by this appeal to the very lowest order of the natural creation.

The instincts of human nature are opposed to man’s sin. “I have nourished and brought up children,” is the complaint of the divine Father, “but they have rebelled against Me.” Human nature prompts man to filial love. The heathen Chinese understand the rights and claims of parents to the respect and obedience of their children, and, without the knowledge of God’s Word to guide them, they present a beautiful example of devotion to filial duty. But Israel, although treated with more than paternal

kindness by the divine Parent, has made no return, but even lifted his puny arm in rebellion against the loving heart that nourished and brought him up as a child.

2. Sin is contrary to reason.

“My people do not consider” is God’s next complaint. Sin results from inconsiderateness. It is contrary to all right reason. God does not require our obedience and service for His glory and greatness, but for our good. His commandments are founded upon inherent righteousness, and disobedience must bring suffering and loss just as certainly as the transgression of any law of nature must be followed by a corresponding retribution. Just as surely as a straight line is the shortest road to a given point, so righteousness and obedience bring to us happiness and reward. As certainly as the fire will burn us if we touch it and the precipice will destroy us if we plunge over its verge, so our going contrary to the will of God must bring to us calamity and misery. Common reason should teach us this.

Therefore “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and a good understanding have all they that keep His commandments;” while, on the other hand, the sinner is a “fool,” and disobedience is not only wickedness, but it is bad judgment and reckless folly. It was when the prodigal “came to himself” that he began to go back to his father, and so salvation is a coming to our right mind and a turning back from the path of foolishness as well as sin.

3. Sin is a weight that drags us down. “Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity.” Iniquity is spoken of as a burden, a handicap, a weight that drags us down. The Lord appeals to sinners as “heavy laden.” Truly, “the way of transgressors is hard.” Oh, the load of anxious care, remorseful fear and burning shame that the sinner carries! Oh, the expedients to which he has to resort to hide his tracks and bury the consequence of his sins! Oh, the darkness and despair of the after view of the sinful pleasure that looked so alluring when seen from the front! Oh, the lives that are being dragged down to untimely graves, to hopeless despair, to suicide and even to madness by the fearful load of sin! Bunyan represents it under the figure of the pilgrim with the burden upon his back; and our blessed Lord is represented as bearing the sinner’s load and finding it so heavy that it crushed out His life on Calvary.

“Oh, Christ! what burdens bowed Thy head,

Our load was laid on Thee.”

Such is the millstone bound to the neck of every sinner that is surely dragging him down. “Laden with iniquity.”

4. Sin is represented as a seed of evil, self-propagating and full of malignant power to reproduce itself. “A seed of evil doers.” It is not only the first generation of sin that we have to fear, but its countless brood of evil reproduction. It is like those malignant germs of disease that are all around us in the air, in the elements of nature, bacilli which propagate themselves by millions every hour and take possession of our vital organs and prey upon our very life.

One sin multiplies itself a thousandfold. Cain’s first act of unbelief soon grew into a bloody murder

and then into an everlasting separation from God. Adam's single disobedience multiplied itself in the ruin of all the race, and your sin is to perpetuate its career of evil in generations yet unborn. You cannot sin alone and you cannot bury your wickedness with your bones.

5. Sin is an infection. "Children that are corrupters." Literally, this means

"children that corrupt others." The language suggests some contagious disease which spreads itself to all that come in contact with it. You would not, for any consideration, lie down in the bed in which a smallpox patient had died last night, and yet you are exposing yourselves to the germs of moral infection in the people you meet, in the friends you cherish, in the books you read, in the plays you attend, in the music you hear and in the objects upon which you allow your eyes to gaze. There is pollution in these things. They poison your spiritual health and inject into your souls the germs of mortal disease. Sin is a plague spot in society, a blight to the family, the church, the holiest friendship and every precious thing.

6. Sin is a provocation of the Lord. "They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger." God cannot endure sin. There is something in His holiness which instinctively consumes it. Just as the mother bird drives the serpent from her nest, so God, even as the God of love, is bound by His very goodness to protect His universe from the poison of sin.

Dear reader, you would scarcely dare to go out beneath the naked lightning of the skies and defy your Creator. And yet every sin, the most secret, is an open defiance of the Almighty, and more offensive often because you try to excuse it by some deceitful plea that you did not really mean it. Remember every time you sin you are flying in the face of an angry God.

7. Sin is incorrigible. "Why should you be stricken any more; you will revolt yet more and more." When God's chastening fails to move us, but leads us on to more reckless disobedience, we are in fearful danger. When we can come back from the gates of death or the graveside of some loved friend and quickly forget all the solemn vows we made and all the good resolutions we pledged if God would only try us once more, we are slowly hardening our hearts and preparing ourselves for the sin against the Holy Ghost. There is a story told of one who, feeling badly after an act of sin, was told by Satan, "Do it again and you won't feel so badly," and, as he obeyed, the sensitiveness passed away and he was soon able to commit sin without the reproof of his conscience. This is indeed true, but it is a fearful truth, and such callousness of heart soon leads to the judgment of God, for "he that being often reprov'd hardens his neck shall be suddenly destroyed and that without remedy." It is mentioned as the most fearful aggravation of the sin of Ahaz that "in the time of his trouble he trespassed yet more against the Lord; thus did that King Ahaz !" It is as if a great note of exclamation had been drawn across the sacred page and a finger pointing to this monster of wickedness whose very warnings seemed only to harden his heart the more.

8. Sin is a vile, loathsome and incurable disease. What a fearful picture! "The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." Sin is soul sickness, desperate, incurable and revolting. Not always does it develop its most loathsome features at the first, but the malignity of the disease is there and sooner or later it will break out into shameless sin and disgusting depravity.

9. Sin is a national curse.

“Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your land strangers devour it,” etc. Has this always been true? The empires and monarchies of the past crumbled to decay through the weight of their own corruptions. Nebuchadnezzar fell through his pride; Medo-Persia through its luxury; Alexander the Great through the success that ruined him; Rome through the moral corruption which undermined society. And, among the kingdoms of Europe, Spain and France are striking examples of the loss of national greatness through the spirit of national corruption. Prosperity leads to luxury, luxury leads to license and self-indulgence, and the mightiest nations of today are drifting to the common lot.

The trouble with human society is not that it wants better principles, better government, better politics, but better materials. It is like the arch which tumbled in ruins and while the experts were discussing the wreck and trying to explain the scientific causes through some defect in the lines of the arch, a common workman picked up a bit of the crumbling brick and, squeezing it between his finger and thumb, it crumbled into dust, as pointing to it he cried,

“That is what’s the matter with your arch; the brick is rotten.” The only remedy for national calamity and degeneration is the transformation of human nature through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

10. Sin brings ruin and desolation to the individual. The picture of Isaiah applies not only to nations and communities, but to families and individuals. Oh, the wrecked homes and lives that have come about through sin, the great destroyer! Dr. Thomas Guthrie has eloquently said:

“Name me the evil that springs not from this root — the crime that I may not lay at its door. Who is the hoary sexton that digs man’s grave? Who is the painted temptress that steals his virtue? Who is the murderess that destroys his life? Who is this sorceress that first deceives and then damns his soul? —

Sin. Who with icy breath blights the fair blossoms of youth? Who breaks the hearts of parents? Who brings old men’s gray hairs with sorrow to the grave? — Sin. Who, by a more hideous metamorphosis than Ovid even fancied, changes gentle children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters, and their fathers into worse than Herods, the murderers of their own innocents? — Sin. Who casts the apple of discord on household tops? Who lights the torch of war and bears it blazing over trembling lands? Who by divisions in the church rends Christ’s seamless robe? — Sin. Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep, and delivers up the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who, winning smiles on her face, honeyed flattery on her tongue, stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality, and when suspicion sleeps treacherously pierces our temples with a nail? What fair Siren is this, who seated on a rock by the deadly pool, smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray, and flings her arm around our neck to leap with us into perdition? — Sin. Who turns the soft and gentlest heart to stone? Who hurls reason from her lofty throne and impels sinners, mad as Gadarenes’ swine, down the precipice, into a lake of fire? — Sin.”

II. Sin seeks to veil its vileness by the cloak of religion. They pleaded their costly and splendid worship, the multitude of their sacrifices and offerings as some excuse for their faults. But the prophet tells them that this is the very worst thing about their sin; that it culminates in hypocrisy and tries to make religion a substitute for righteousness. The world has plenty of religion but the devil uses it as a

channel for the very worst forms of sensuality, licentiousness and sin. God will not accept the worship of insincere hearts and impure hands. Sin prevents His answering our prayers, for “if we regard iniquity in our heart, then God will not hear us.” Sin defiles our most sacred offerings. Sin makes our religion the very worst of all our crimes. “Bring no more vain oblations” is Jehovah’s cry, “incense is an abomination to Me. It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates, and when you spread forth your hands I will hide My eyes, yes, when you make many prayers I will not hear you; your hands are full of blood.”

The two words which express the character of Judah, as given by Isaiah are wickedness and worship. They had plenty of worship, costly worship, splendid worship, but it was stained with sin, and more offensive to God than even their grossest crimes.

Beloved reader, is your very religion cursed by your unrighteousness? Are your prayers neutralized by your unhallowed lives, and are you shutting the very gates of mercy against your poor soul by your presumptuous sins? Oh, stop and consider before the day shall come of which He has spoken, “Then shall they call, but I will not answer them; they shall seek Me early but they shall not find Me.”

12. Their sin was indelible, incurable and inveterate. The strong adjectives used in our text, “scarlet” and “crimson,” describe not merely the deepest tint possible but a kind of dye that was absolutely indelible. It was made from the eggs of a certain insect, and the stain could never be effaced. The word literally means “double-dyed.” There is no earthly power can take away the stain of human depravity. Culture will not do it. Educate and refine a monster, but at heart he is a monster still. They tell a quaint story of an Oriental despot, who among his queer pets had a little educated pig, which he dressed up in costly raiment, with jeweled rings and chains of gold, but whenever he let it free to gambol in the garden, it invariably plunged into the ditch, and came back defiled with mire and filth. At last he threatened it with death if it ever transgressed again. As it lay that night in terror of the morrow, knowing that the old habit would come back again and plunge it in the ditch once more, a nymph came to its side and offered to cure its swinish heart; and then, the juvenile legend tells us, the nymph took a little lamb and by a surgical operation took out its heart, and after a similar operation on the pig, exchanged the two hearts, and transferred the heart of the lamb to the heart of the trembling little culprit. Next day it was all right, and with the nature of the lamb it loved to gambol in the green fields and keep itself pure. The king was delighted and the pet was saved.

The foolish parable tells the story of the helplessness of the human heart apart from the grace of God. Let us find it out as quickly as we can, for true hope can only begin when we come to self-despair.

II. Salvation.

1. Repentance. The first step in our deliverance from sin is one that we must take. There is something we can do. “Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes, cease to do evil and learn to do well.” This is the preliminary step to every transformed life. You must refuse the evil. You must say “No” to sin. You must give God the right to make you holy. You cannot make yourself holy, but you can consent that He shall. Are you sick enough of sin to do this? Are you ready to take the first step which the old soldier so well described as “right about face.” That is what the word repentance really means. It is to look the other way, to think the other way and to change your attitude towards sin and God.

2. Mercy. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, yet shall they be as wool." There is a double process here. The first is expressed by the figure of the snow. It does not cleanse, but it covers our sin. After the first fall of the virgin snow, your backyard has still the old refuse there, but the snowy mantle covers it immediately. This is what God does for every sinner when He justifies him through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is the imputed righteousness of Christ, and the vilest sinner may accept it, and in a moment be covered by the spotless robe of the Redeemer and be as white as snow. The other process is deeper and more intrinsic. The cleansing of the wool suggests the finest fibers of our nature, and represents that sanctifying work which the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the soul that yields to Him. That begins with the work of regeneration and reaches on to all the fulness of the Spirit until we are completely transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, and every fiber of our being is spotless as His holy nature.

3. The act by which we become partakers of all this grace is an act of the will.

"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land." It is not an emotional feeling merely that brings us into contact with the grace of God, but it is a choice, a decision, a fixed purpose. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Shall we meet this simple, practical condition, and with the whole strength of our will say "no" to sin and "yes" to God forevermore?

4. The sequel of all this is an obedient life. "If you be willing and obedient."

The essence of sin was disobedience, and the remedy for sin is a life of willing love and obedience to Him who only asks us to obey Him because it is best for us.

5. And finally, the blessed recompense. "You shall eat the good of the land."

Oh, how good the land of obedience is to its happy children here, and how glorious the inheritance to which it leads forevermore!

God help us to see our sin, to accept His salvation and to walk with Him in holy obedience and happy fellowship.

Chapter 3 – Isaiah’s Vision

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord.” (Isa. 2: 2-5.)

The second address of the prophet is contained in chapters 2 to 4 inclusive. It begins with a sublime vision of the future glory of Israel and Jerusalem. This is immediately followed by the dark picture of the present condition of things which was anything but ideal. But after the dark eclipse and the long interval of sin and judgment, the vision returns and the closing paragraphs of the fourth chapter are radiant with the promise of a holy people and the presence of their covenant God in the fulness of blessing and the fulfilment of the opening vision.

I. The ideal.

Isaiah’s vision was not original. His words are quoted from an older prophet, the stern and eccentric figure that suddenly appeared in Jerusalem in the early days of Hezekiah’s reign and, with wild gestures and tones of agony and terror, summoned the king and the people to repentance, and became the instrument of Hezekiah’s conversion. It was the prophet Micah who first uttered this sublime picture of the future glory of the house of the Lord, and Isaiah prefixes it to his second address somewhat as a modern minister would put a text at the commencement of his sermon.

1. In the vision of Micah and Isaiah the Lord’s house occupies the center of the stage and the foreground of the picture. It is the old conception of the theocracy, a state founded upon the throne of Jehovah and placing His authority and worship above all other obligations.

2. The house of the Lord is represented as a mountain. The figure suggests vastness, loftiness and glory and the conception in the prophet’s mind is that God’s house, which simply stands for His cause, is the grandest of all causes and the noblest of all institutions. Mountains are used in prophetic imagery to represent great kingdoms. But all earthly organizations dwindle into insignificance in comparison with “His kingdom which is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion which endures unto all generations.” A distinguished statesman, having been appointed as an elder in a humble village church and permitted to pass to the congregation the emblems of the Lord’s supper, remarked that he felt more highly honored in having the humblest place in the service of God than when he had held the highest offices from his sovereign and his country. The day is coming when the lowliest servant of the King of kings will be a prince compared with the proud rulers of time.

3. It is above all other mountains.

It is to be “established upon the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills.”

The Chinese place their sacred pagodas on the loftiest hills and will not suffer a commercial building or a missionary edifice to overtop their sacred temples. They literally carry out the idea that the houses of their gods must be exalted above all hills.

The spiritual conception is fine. The claims of Christ should overtop all other claims. The authority of God should be supreme above all other influences. Have we thus exalted His throne in our hearts and crowned Him “Lord of all”?

4. The Lord’s house is to be the center of attraction for the world. “All nations shall flow unto it.” The name of Jesus already is the mightiest name on earth and the day is coming when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord,” and when all men shall come to Him as the source of life and every blessing. “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.”

Zechariah has given us a sublime vision of a day that is coming when Jesus shall hold an annual reception in Jerusalem and all nations shall go up once a year to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles and to worship at the feet of our glorified Lord.

The vision of Isaiah shall then be fulfilled and Christ shall indeed be the center of all hearts and all nations.

5. The house of the Lord is to be the light of the world for “He shall teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths.” Jerusalem was the light of the ancient world. All true knowledge of God and righteousness came from the divine oracles committed to the chosen people, and from the same Jerusalem came the light of the Gospel in the apostolic age. Once more in the millennial age is Jerusalem again to be the center of light for all men, and the Word of God to go forth to all earth’s millions, so that the “knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” That day has not yet come. At present we are simply giving “the gospel as a witness” to all nations and “gathering out from among the Gentiles a people for His name,” but a brighter light is yet to shine from shore to shore and all nations shall walk in the light of the Lord.

6. The house of the Lord is to be the seat of government for the world. “The law shall go forth from Zion.” One of the curses of the nations today is bad government. It has been somewhat improved through the influence of Christianity among the nations, but we have no Christian nations as yet and never will have a truly Christian nation until the Lord Jesus comes. Then “the King shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment.” Then

“He shall judge the poor of the people; He shall save the children of the needy and shall break in pieces the oppressor. In His days shall the righteous flourish and abundance of peace so long as the moon endures.”

7. This will bring the golden age of the world. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” Man is trying to bring this about through human governments and arbitration treaties. We thank God for what has been accomplished, but the facts of current history are almost a caricature

of man's pretensions, The very heavens must laugh as they behold the kings who at one time were most active in establishing the tribunals of peace a little later provoking by their tyranny the horrors of the world's most terrible wars.

But the sentiment for peace is born from above and the echoes that float along the centuries in human sentiment and poetry speak forth a deep undercurrent of divine intuition. Not vainly has the poet dreamed of that golden age :

“Through the dark future, down long generations

The echoing sounds grow fainter and then cease,

And like a bell with solemn, sweet vibrations

I hear the voice of God again say Peace;

Peace, and no longer from its brazen portals

The voice of war's loud thunder shakes the skies.

But beautiful as songs of the immortals

The holy melodies of Love arise.”

II. The failure.

But not yet is the vision. It is as true as it is sublime and beautiful, but, like Isaiah's, it must wait until He comes, the Prince of Peace, the Lord of lords. How very stirring to find the young prophet of Jerusalem starting out in his splendid career with this glorious vision. How true to the loftiest natures and the history of every great movement. All great lives begin with such visions. It is this that stirs the breast of patriotism and makes the heroes whose lives have illuminated the pages of history. It is this that moved the Crusader and still inspires the philanthropist, the social reformer, the Christian worker and the world-wide missionary. No life will ever be illustrious until it has had its visions.

Gideons must Isaiahs be,

Vision first, then victory.”

But alas, the brightest vision must seem to fade and imagination and hope must learn to join hands with patience and faith and wait until God's full time has come. It is all true. It is less than the glorious truth for “eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him and which God has revealed unto us by His Spirit.”

But there is another vision and that is the actual reality of life and humanity, and as we turn to that we shall find, as Isaiah did when he turned his eyes from heaven to earth, that the “gold has become dim and the most fine gold changed.” What a picture of corruption met his gaze!

7. The corruption of the rulers.

“How is the faithful city become an harlot. It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Your silver is become dross, your wine mixed with water: thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loves gifts and follows after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them.” (Is. 1: 21-23.) And here is another picture. “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths. The Lord stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people. The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of His people, and the princes thereof: for you have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean you that you beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts.” (Is. 3: 12-15.) We have become accustomed even in our modern republican life to such exposures of official corruption. Even the best forms of government do not change the selfishness and unscrupulousness of fallen nature. The righteous Judge looks down with indignation upon the reeking and ever-recurring spectacle of oppression, selfishness and misrule and longs for the day when the scepter of righteousness shall be the scepter of His kingdom and earth shall cease to groan beneath the heels of her oppressors.

2. Luxury. “Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots.” (Is. 2: 7.) Prosperity and wealth had debauched the nation and the leading families were given up to self-indulgence and luxurious pleasure which is always a demoralizing influence in the life of nations and which today is threatening the very foundations of society.

3. Idolatry and superstition. “Therefore You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.” (Is. 2: 6, 8.)

Their relations with heathen nations had introduced their abominations in the form of idolatry, sorcery and devil worship. Our own times, notwithstanding our boasted civilization, have not escaped the same peril. While we do not bow down to idols of wood and stone, we are running after the identical things that had this outcome of their coarser idolatries, for idolatry is but devil worship, and in modern Spiritualism, clairvoyance, Buddhism, Theosophy and Christian Science we have simply later forms of the same devil worship which the great father of lies is seeking to substitute for the worship of the true God in every age, and which he is refining to suit the tastes of the times and succeeding in palming off upon our boasted culture with unprecedented success.

4. Pride. “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.” (Is. 2: 11-17.)

The spirit of pride is peculiarly offensive to God. It grows with prosperity and human progress until man becomes his own god. The prophet's severest denunciations are hurled against the high looks and the haughty pride of Jerusalem and the modern prophet might as fittingly denounce the swollen vanity, the self-sufficiency, the assumption, the national vainglory and the intellectual boastfulness of our own age. A recent writer stated that it was the glory of the nineteenth century that it has given us humanity. Man's confidence in himself and his own sufficiency is a practical atheism that dominates much of human thought today.

5. The vanity and corruption of woman. Finally the prophet's piercing glance turns to the loud and showy women who form perhaps a large part of his audience and who with haughty necks and scornful eyes are beginning to frown down the awful message of the young enthusiast to whom they had listened for awhile with such admiration and pride. But now their faces blanch while he cries: "Moreover the Lord says, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, the chains, and the bracelets and the mufflers, the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, the rings and nose jewels, the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty." (Is. 3: 16-24.)

This fearful picture might be adjusted without much strain to one of the fashionable parades of today. It is not wrong for women to dress with modest taste, for God has made the world beautiful and given to woman the instinct of good taste. But when a woman dresses for display, for adornment, for personal vanity and to become a center of attraction for the eyes of men, she degrades herself and dishonors her womanhood and her God. It is very significant that the one thing he says about women here is about their dress. It would seem as if a woman's character was expressed in her apparel. You can tell the pure and modest woman by her dress. You can tell the loud, vain and immodest woman by her walk, her look and her array.

God help you, dear sisters, to dress as women becoming godliness, and above all other charms to wear the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which in the sight of God is of great price."

The condition of woman in Isaiah's time was one of the very evidences of the degeneration of the nation and the awful precursor of the shame, the outrage and the ruin in which they were so soon to be involved in the ruthless grasp of their pitiless enemies.

III. The later vision.

But the dark eclipse is to pass away and when judgment shall have done its fearful work the day at last will come of which the prophet says, "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem, shall be called

holy, even everyone that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.” (Is. 4: 2-4.)

The change is to come about partly by divine judgment, bringing conviction of sin, but more fully through the work of the Holy Spirit whom the Messiah is to bring and who is to cleanse them “through the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning.” This was the message later of John the Baptist, as he announced the coming Savior, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.”

This is the only remedy for all wrong social conditions and for all the evils of our hearts and lives. The coal that touched Isaiah’s lips and consumed his sins must burn out from us the taint of depravity and burn in the holy image of our God.

But it was only the remnant that was to be delivered. “Them that are escaped of Israel and he that is left in Zion and he that remains in Jerusalem.” The whole nation was not to be saved, but “a remnant according to the election of grace.”

This is the principle on which God is working now for both Jew and Gentile. He is not saving all the world, but “gathering out of the Gentiles a people for His name.” He is not saving all Israel, but a remnant from among them are finding the light, accepting the Messiah and getting ready for the glory of the latter days. The work of God is not a wholesale work today, but a little flock, a humble minority.

Dear reader, are you in this remnant? Have you turned from the great broad road of time and are you in the narrow way and with the little flock?

And when this remnant shall have been saved, sanctified and prepared, then will come in all its fulness, the vision of the glory. How sublimely the prophet describes it, “And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion and upon her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defense. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.” (Is. 4: 5-6.)

It is the old symbolism of the pillar of cloud and fire that led them through the wilderness and the tabernacle round which they gathered before their covenant God, only all this ancient symbolism is to reach a splendor in the coming age such as only the later visions of the New Testament fully unfold.

The apostle John describes the vision of this tabernacle in the language of the Apocalypse, “The tabernacle of God shall be with men and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them and shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain for the former things have passed away. He that sits upon the throne shall dwell among them; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat, for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them unto living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

God bring us to that glorious time and that happy company. Isaiah began his visions of sin and sorrow, of darkness and judgment, with this glorious picture. He could not have stood the darkness if he had not first seen the light. Let us go forth into our mission in this world of sin and sorrow with a vision as bright and clear as the ancient prophet. And when our hearts grow sick with sin and all seems dark and wrong let us remember the vision and keep saying,

“Though it tarry, yet it will surely come; though He tarry, yet He will surely come,” and the light of that blessed hope will lift us above the shadows of the present evil world and enable us to live under “the powers of the age to come.”

Chapter 4 – Isaiah and Jerusalem

While the great prophet surveys the whole world-wide horizon and has a message for all the nations, yet his special message is to Judah and Jerusalem and he looks at every other question from the standpoint of the chosen people.

I. His first message to his own people is a vision of sin and judgment. This occupies the first chapter and is a fearful indictment to the sinful nation, closing with the solemn announcement of judgment which is surely coming. “I will turn my hand upon you and purely purge away your dross and take away all your tin. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.” (Is. 1: 25, 27, 28.)

1. This is followed in the second chapter by a glorious vision of Judah and Jerusalem in the last days. “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Is. 2: 2-4.) The vision of faith does not rest long upon the dark shadows of sin and judgment, but looks onward to the glory of the latter days, for “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance,” and Jehovah will not suffer even Judah’s sins to frustrate His purpose of blessing.

3. The prophet’s vision next returns to the approaching judgment which is about to fall upon Jerusalem on account of her rebellion and disobedience. This is described in chapter 22: 1-12. This message is called “the burden of the valley of vision” and is a vivid picture of the siege of the city by the Assyrians. “You that are full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city; your slain men are not slain with the sword nor dead in battle. Therefore said I, look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labor not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains.” (Is 22: 2, 4, 5.) The vision is repeated in chapter 29: 1-8, where Jerusalem is represented under the name of Ariel; that is, the Lion of God. “And the multitude of all the nations that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision.” (Is. 29: 7.)

4. Next we have the warning of Isaiah against the Egyptian alliance in chapter 31: 1-3. The prophet foretells the humiliation of Egypt and the confession of the foolish politicians that had leaned on this broken reed, instead of trusting in the Lord. “Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose : therefore have I cried concerning this, their strength is to sit still.” (Is. 30: 3, 7.)

“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord. Yet He also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back His words; but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the Lord shall stretch out His hand, both he that helps shall fall, and he that is helped shall fall down, and they all shall fall together.” (Is. 31: 1-3.)

5. But now the vision changes from warning and judgment to help and deliverance. God sees His people in the distress which they have brought upon themselves and He flies to their relief. “For thus has the Lord spoken unto me, like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them; so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also He will deliver it; and passing over He will preserve it.” (Is. 31: 4, 5.) This, no doubt, refers to the sudden and glorious deliverance of Jerusalem from the army of Sennacherib. (Is. 37: 36.) This promise is repeated when the hour of danger comes, and like the answering echo, the word is answered by the deed and the record of promise and deliverance follow each other. “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, says the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for my own sake, and for my servant David’s sake. Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.” (Is. 37: 33-36.)

6. The prediction of Judah’s captivity was left for a later prophet, Jeremiah; but to Isaiah was given the distinguished honor of looking over the captivity and foretelling the glorious return of the captive bands from Babylon. Chapter 35: 1-10 is the exquisite panorama of this joyful procession. As they passed homeward “the wilderness and the solitary place were glad for them and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose.” This beautiful picture has become the panorama of the Pilgrim’s Progress along the heavenly highway to the home above. What a beautiful return it was to the captives of Zion, we learn from the story of Ezra, as he tells us how the fathers that remembered the time when they had left Jerusalem led in chains, wept for joy when they looked once more upon the heights of Zion after the seventy years at Babylon.

In the vision of chapters 44: 28 through 45: 4 we have a more exact account of the principal circumstances connected with their return, at last, with the most important of these circumstances; namely, the fact that it was to come about through Cyrus, king of Persia. That Isaiah should be able to tell us the name of the very man that should be sitting upon the throne of Persia at that time, and that should send back the captives of Jerusalem is one of the miracles of prophecy. When we realize that this was nearly two hundred years before the event occurred, it is not wonderful that the higher critics, who cannot understand anything supernatural, should feel compelled to conclude that there must have been two Isaiahs, one in the days of Hezekiah and one in the days of Cyrus, who knew what he was talking about, because he was describing the history of his own times. How sublime the picture given of this mighty conqueror, like a pawn in the hands of Jehovah. “For Jacob, my servant’s

sake and Israel, my elect, I have even called you by your name; I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me.” (45: 4.)

Many of the later visions of Isaiah are but echoes of this glad story of Israel’s return from Babylon. To the prophet’s imagination the vision came with no exact logical or chronological order, but with mingled lights and shades in which events overlapped, and often overleaped each other in sublime confusion, so that the same verse often describes the return of the captives from Babylon, and the restoration of Israel in the last days. As when we gaze at two mountains in perspective, they seem to blend as one mountain, although they may be miles apart; so the vision of the prophet often combines two events far removed in time and yet having common features of resemblance.

7. The next chapter in the history of Judah was the coming of Messiah and His rejection by the nation. The light which falls upon this vision in Isaiah is somewhat dim, and yet it is clear enough for us to recognize “the Man of Sorrows,” “despised and rejected of men, with no form or comeliness; and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him: we hid as it were, our faces from Him: He was despised and we esteemed Him not.”

Still later we see Him “treading the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him.” The apostle Paul quotes from Isaiah with reference to the rejection of Christ by Israel and says, “all day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” The very chapter which most vividly describes the coming of the Messiah, Isaiah 53, begins with a wail of disappointment over the unbelief of the nation, “Lord, who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

8. But there is a brighter vision in Isaiah, the restoration of the people at last through the coming of their Messiah once more and their repentance and return to Him. The apostle Paul quotes again, from Isaiah 59: 20, in his triumphant conclusion in Romans 11: 26, “and so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” The last five chapters of Isaiah are bright with the promise of the glory of Jerusalem in the latter days. “Arise, shine, for your light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you” (Is. 61: 1) is the call that summons Zion to her restoration and glorious destiny. Her blessing is to overflow to all the nations “the gentiles shall see your righteousness and all kings your glory.” “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.” As the apostle expresses it in his profound discussion of the whole question of Israel in Romans 9-11: “If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?”

Chapter 5 – Isaiah and the Nations

We cannot properly understand the visions of Isaiah without having a clear conception of the neighboring nations which filled so large a place in contemporary history, and so frequently form the subject of the prophets’

messages. Palestine was situated midway between the two great empires of the world. On the west was Egypt with her tributary states in Africa, generally described under the name of Ethiopia. On the east was Assyria, which was superseded and succeeded later by Babylon. These two mighty empires lived in constant jealousy and conflict, and in the marching and counter-marching of their mighty armies the intervening states of Western Asia became the constant battle ground of the world. These states clustered close to the Mediterranean coast. Chief among them were Judah and Israel. The one with its capital at Jerusalem, shut away to a considerable extent by its inaccessible situation among the hills, was more likely to escape the notice of these passing armies. The other, Israel with its beautiful capital Samaria in the most fertile part of the valley of Northern Palestine, lay in the very path of these contending armies. Further north were the three powerful kingdoms of Syria, Hamath and Tyre, the great maritime kingdom of antiquity. Around the southern frontier of Judah were Edom, Moab and Arabia. These midway states, exposed as they were to one or the other of the great contending parties, were under the constant temptation of joining forces either with Egypt or Assyria for their own protection. Sometimes their joint action took the form of a mutual alliance between each other against the common foe. The politics of Judah and Israel, therefore, circulated about the question of these alliances. The shrewd politicians of Hezekiah’s court were always plotting for some convention, either with Egypt, Assyria or the smaller states. In opposition to this we constantly find Isaiah protesting against all entangling alliances and appealing to the people to remember that God is their national King and able to protect them, Himself, without their leaning upon the broken reed of earthly powers. All these states, he tells them, are themselves to be involved before long in national ruin and their fate will only drag God’s people down with them.

We find the early portion of Isaiah’s prophecies occupied, therefore, with a series of visions relating to these surrounding nations.

I. SYRIA

In Isaiah 7: 1, an alliance between Israel and Syria was made against Jerusalem, and King Ahaz was greatly alarmed. This was the occasion for Isaiah’s first vision and message regarding Syria in chapter 8: 4. In this message the prophet declares that before the child, which had just been born to him, “shall have knowledge to cry, my father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.” The vision is renewed in Isaiah 17: 1-11, and a fuller description is given of the fall of Damascus and the extinction of Syria. “The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. And the fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and from the rest of Syria.” All this came to pass under Shalmaneser in the same invasion in which the Ten Tribes were carried away captive and the kingdom of Israel destroyed.

2. ASSYRIA (Is. 10: 5-16.)

This is a sublime passage in which Assyria is represented as a proud, vainglorious power which imagines that its victories are through its own strength and through the favor of its idol gods; while it is merely a rod and an axe in the hand of God, used to chasten His people and then broken and thrown away. So Assyria was to be broken too. Again in Isaiah 14: 25 the vision is continued, "I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders."

3. BABYLON

Babylon is the next of these world powers to come in for judgment.

The remarkable feature about the prophet's vision of Babylon is that as yet the mighty Babylonian monarchy had not risen, Babylon being only a province of Assyria. Nearly two centuries were yet to elapse before the destruction of this mighty city, and yet the prophet describes in the minutest details the ruin which came through Cyrus. The ages which followed have only proved how exact was the prophetic picture of Isaiah 13: 13-22, Isaiah 14: 4-6 and Isaiah 34: 9-15.

"Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man takes up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee everyone into his own land. Everyone that is found shall be thrust through: And every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes: their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant places: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged."

"You shall take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, how has the oppressor ceased, the golden city ceased? The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, and the scepter of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hinders."

"And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; the smoke thereof shall go up forever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it forever and ever. But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it; and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns

shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof : and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beast of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered everyone with her mate.”

4. MOAB

Moab was really a kindred race to Judah and Israel, being descended from Lot through his wicked daughters. Moab was always jealous of Israel and richly deserved the judgment which at last came upon her. Balak, the king of Moab, tried his best to destroy Israel as they passed through the wilderness, and afterwards succeeded through Balaam in bringing them into unholy relations with the daughters of Moab and thus falling under the divine judgment. In the later history of Judah, Moab proved itself a treacherous foe by standing guard at the fords of the river and refusing to let the fugitives from the destruction of Jerusalem escape. The two chapters, Isaiah 15 and 16, contain “the burden of Moab” and pronounce punishment and ruin upon the people and their cities.

5. ETHIOPIA

The eighteenth chapter of Isaiah contains “the burden of Ethiopia.” “The land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.” How perfectly this describes that great Eastern Soudan, whose bird-life is fluttering ever upon the air, and whose people have indeed been “scattered and peeled, a nation meted out and trodden under foot.” But from this people there is yet to be brought a “present unto the Lord of hosts, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion.” All this is to come in due time through the gospel of the grace of God, which is at length beginning to reach this oppressed people.

6. EGYPT (Is. 19: 1-25.)

Generally speaking, this prediction is intended to show to the people of Isaiah’s time the utter vanity of trusting in the Egyptian alliance, because Egypt herself is to be led away captive by the king of Assyria. “And the Lord said, like as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years, for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot.” (Isa. 20: 3, 4.) Thus the confidence of those who had looked for safety to an Egyptian alliance is to be confounded and put to shame. There are some mysterious and remarkable references in the nineteenth chapter which have been variously interpreted. The nineteenth verse has been supposed by many to refer to the extraordinary galleries in the great pyramid of Egypt, which are considered by some to be a symbolical picture of the ages and of the plan of redemption. The twenty-second verse,

“the Lord shall smite Egypt and heal it,” has been wondrously fulfilled, and the closing verse is, no doubt, prophetic of millennial times when Israel’s blessings, as the queen of nations, shall also reach and overflow to Egypt and Assyria.

7. EDOM (Is. 21: 11-13.)

Edom was a sort of cousin to Israel, but, like many other secondhand relations, was more unfriendly than even Israel's enemies. "He called to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night: if you will enquire, enquire you, return, come." Edom's watchmen are represented as crying unto the prophetic watchman, "What of the night?" and the answer comes, "The morning comes and also the night." For Israel it was to be morning, but for Edom night. How dark the night of Edom history tells us and travelers today can only find the ruins of that greatness which has forever passed away.

8. ARABIA

The vision of Edom is followed by that of Arabia. (Is. 21: 13-17.) Even the scattered tribes of the desert were to share in the awful tide of carnage and war, which the Assyrian was to bring over the whole of western Asia. The glory of Kedar should fail and the traveling companies of Dedanim be scattered abroad.

9. TYRE (Is. 23:1-18.)

The mighty city of commerce and world-wide riches was to be smitten too.

"The burden of Tyre. Howl, you ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them. Be still, you inhabitants of the isle; you whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue; and she is a mart of nations. Be you ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea has spoken, even the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor bring up virgins."

"He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms; the Lord has given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strongholds thereof. And he said, you shall no more rejoice, O you oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon; arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shall you have no rest. And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot. And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the Lord will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing." For seventy years Tyre was to be broken and then restored and the day was to come when even her selfish and godless trade should be consecrated to the service of the Lord. This represents, no doubt, the general idea of the consecration of wealth and becomes a type for our own times. Oh, that it might be true today, in this age of commercial selfishness and corruption, that our "merchandise"

and our "hire shall be holiness unto the Lord."

The Northern Kingdom of the Ten Tribes also comes in for its message of judgment. "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, which, as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters

overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet. And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which, when he that looks upon it sees; while it is yet in his hand he eats it up.” (Is. 28: 1-4.) What a picture of earthliness, drunkenness and the prostitution of natural beauty and blessing to selfishness and sin! What a message to this age of luxury and culture! How fearfully all this was at length fulfilled in the fall of Samaria and the ruin of the kingdom of Israel and how surely the same moral conditions are to bring the same judgment to every godless and sinful people.

Chapter 6 – The Incarnation Sign

“Moreover the Lord spoke again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isa. 7: 10-14.)

King Ahaz was in great perplexity and despair. The allied armies of Syria and Israel were invading his land, and he had determined to apply to the great king of Assyria to come to his assistance. While this would undoubtedly bring temporary relief, yet to the farseeing faith of Isaiah it was plain that it would inevitably lead to greater danger in the future, and that as soon as the conqueror had found his way to the Mediterranean coast he would speedily come back to lay his greedy hand upon Judah and Jerusalem too. This was exactly what came to pass. The Assyrian king did go against Damascus and Samaria, and eventually blotted out both kingdoms; but he came back also against Jerusalem before long, and the most terrible dangers and sufferings of the dynasty of David came through the very alliance which Ahaz was now about to make.

The prophet Isaiah therefore threw all the weight of his influence against this proposed alliance with Assyria. Going out to meet the king in one of the public avenues of the suburbs, as he was driving in his chariot with his retinue, he earnestly appealed to him not to be afraid of the two firebrands of Syria and Israel, because God had said, “It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.” As the king hesitated, the prophet appealed to him to ask a sign of God for the encouragement of his weak faith; but the king, persisting in his wilful purpose, with mock humility declined, and said, “I will not ask a sign neither will I tempt the Lord.” Then the prophet turned from Ahaz to his attendants, and cried out, “Oh! house of David, hear now, is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.”

The local meaning and application of this message has been much discussed by Bible expositors. Many believe that the primary reference was to some woman unmarried at the time, who was afterwards to be married and give birth to a child, in connection, perhaps, with the royal family, and that this was to be the immediate sign intended by the prophet, while ultimately the type looked forward to the greater event of the Messiah’s birth. It seems unworthy of so great a theme to make any temporary and local application. To apply this prophecy at all to the birth of a child through the ordinary course of nature would throw discredit upon the stupendous miracle of the Savior’s supernatural birth at Bethlehem. There seems no reason at all to attempt any other fulfilment than that which actually did occur when Christ was born of the virgin in the fulness of time.

The only objection seems to be that the prophet appeared to expect this event immediately. But in the perspective of prophecy it has always been the case that such events loomed so large that they appeared nearer than they actually were. The prophecies of our Lord’s second coming in the New Testament read as though the writers expected the Lord to come during their own lifetime, and yet

nearly two thousand years have rolled away and the actual event is not yet. Like some vast mountain, which looms so high as you approach that it seems just before you, although it is scores of miles away, so the coming of the Messiah, more than seven centuries distant, appeared to Isaiah's vision to be just at hand.

We have no hesitation, therefore, in applying this verse directly to the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. The prophetic announcement of this event in itself is almost as great a miracle as the Incarnation itself. So supernatural was the conception of one born of a virgin that it is said the translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Septuagint tried to find some other word than "virgin," and to substitute the word "woman." They felt that the Greek scholars of Alexandria and the common sense of the world would laugh at the idea of the Virgin Born.

This bold and naked prophecy, standing out like a mountain crag seven hundred and fifty years before the event in the writings of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, is in itself a sublime witness to Jesus Christ, which to the present time the Jew is unable to explain away. A French scholar has said that the story of Jesus Christ as a human invention would have been more wonderful than the actual events of His history. If it was an invention, who is the stupendous genius that created this transcendent work of literature? We know the author of the Iliad, of Milton's Paradise Lost, and of other great works of literature, but who is the great Unknown that gave to the ages the book of Jesus of Nazareth? No, the story is as marvelous as the Christ. And so this prophecy of Isaiah stands out as a finger pointing to Bethlehem, and as the prophet here expressed it God's great "sign."

In what sense is Jesus, and especially the Incarnation of Jesus, God's sign to Israel and the world?

I. As already indicated, the prophetic announcement, coupled with its extraordinary fulfilment as recorded in the Gospels, is a convincing sign and demonstration that Jesus Christ is indeed the Messiah, and that Christianity must be divine. It is not merely the gospel story which establishes this, but the extraordinary fact that more than seven centuries before the greatest of the Hebrew prophets had declared to an unbelieving age that this very thing should occur. The prophecy was not understood at the time, and was an inexplicable riddle to the Jewish rabbis. The very strangeness of the announcement makes it all the more impossible for it to have been a collusion or a merely human utterance, and the exact correspondence, later, of the fact with the prediction gives to the miraculous birth of our Lord an emphasis which, to a candid inquirer, is simply beyond criticism.

II. The Incarnation is God's sign to Israel and the world of His interest in the human race and in the chosen people. The translation of the prophetic name "Immanuel" expresses all this in a single sentence — "God with us." What stronger assurance can we ask of the divine love and care? It was the dying message of John Wesley, "The best of all is, God is with us." So great did this manifestation of the divine love seem to Zacharias that it unsealed his dumb lips and called forth the joyful cry, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people." The dream of ancient mythology was the coming down of the gods into human form and human life. But the Incarnation has brought us the everlasting union of the Deity with our fallen race. God has committed Himself to humanity and has taken up humanity into Deity, and through endless ages a Man shall sit upon the throne of the universe and share with the infinite God all His attributes and glories.

One of the rulers of Egypt, it is said, was rearing a valuable obelisk upon its base. At the last moment,

in order to impress the engineer with the importance of his responsibility, he fastened his only son to the summit of the obelisk, and then pointing to it said, "Be careful, the life of the heir hangs upon the fate of the obelisk."

In an infinitely higher sense, God has attached the very life of His own dear Son to the fortunes of this world. Jesus Christ is so identified with man that our failure would be His failure, and He cannot afford to let us fail. Just as your child is part of your very life and cannot cease to be your child, so we belong to God, and God is bound by His own very nature to guard our interests and guarantee our glorious destiny.

Speaking of this in the epistle to the Hebrews, the inspired apostle says: "For both He that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.... Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death; that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." (Heb. 2: 14-17.)

III. The Incarnation is the sign of the supernatural character of Christianity. Two schools of thought divide the minds of men, the one is evolution, the other is the supernatural. The tendency of unbelief today is to explain everything on the principles of rationalism. The whole character of the gospel is opposed to this. It is not a development; it is not the improvement of moral and social conditions through culture. It is a revolution rather than an evolution and the apostle's words are true of the whole process of redemption.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new, and all things are of God." Even Isaac, the type of the great Messiah, could not come in the ordinary course of nature, but the promise had to wait until Abraham and Sarah had outlived their natural strength and the birth of the seed of promise was through a physical miracle in their own bodies. Still more manifestly was the Messiah Himself born, not through natural generation, but through the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost.

But the supernatural did not cease there. Christianity is divine from first to last. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ were the fitting climaxes of His miraculous birth and the conversion of every follower of the Savior is a miracle just as divine. "Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God." Sanctification, too, is not a mere process of self-denial and spiritual endeavor, but it is a miracle of the indwelling Christ incarnate again in every believer.

Prayer is just an open door through which the Deity still interposes in the affairs of human life. And the great consummation is to come, not in the gradual uplift of human society through the forces of civilization, but in "the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven," and an age of righteousness and glory that will only come with the coming of the King Himself. Of all this the Virgin Birth in Bethlehem was God's great sign.

IV. The Incarnation was a reversal of all man's ideas of character, goodness and greatness. Other

kings are born amid the acclamations of the multitude and crowned with earthly state and splendid pageant. Other systems of thought tell us about self-exaltation, self-reliance and self-assertion. Christianity begins with self-renunciation. The first step is downward and the only pathway to ascension and glory is the way of humiliation. "He that shall humble himself shall be exalted." "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many." The apostle has given us the great pattern in the second chapter of Philippians,

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2: 5-11.)

V. The Incarnation is God's sign and revelation of His own character and will concerning men.

Therefore in connection with His incarnation our Lord is called "The Word."

"The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld His glory, even the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father full of grace and truth."

Christ as the Word is the expression of God's character and will toward men. Christ is the Answer to all our questioning and the personal Messenger of God to men. "God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." (Heb. 1: 1.) The blessed Babe of Bethlehem, the loving Friend of sinners, the Teacher who unfolded such wondrous words of grace, He was but the voice of the mysterious Being whom human hearts so long have dreaded. "He that has seen Me has seen the Father. The words which I speak are not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." Would you know how God feels toward sinners, sufferers and helpless mortals? Jesus is the Answer speaking more loudly than words, for He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life."

VI. The Incarnate Christ is God's sign in another sense namely, as revealing the hearts of men. This was what the angel said about Him when the annunciation came to Mary, "This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel and for a sign that shall be spoken against that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed." Human character and destiny are revealed by contact with Jesus Christ. Men are not saved or lost merely by moral character, but by their attitude toward the Son of God. As of old He hung on Calvary between two men that represented at once both heaven and hell, so still it is true that the cross of Jesus is the dividing line between lost and saved men. "On either side one and Jesus in the midst." Dear reader, on which side are you? Your present character and eternal destiny are to be decided by your attitude toward Him.

VII. Jesus Christ is a sign in the sense that He is the condition and guarantee of all God's promises and covenants. "All the promises of God in Him are yes and in Him amen." He is the Surety and Guarantor of every claim we have upon God. Just as the endorsement of the bank officials passes your draft, so every petition we present in the high court of heaven must bear the sign of His name. We

are chosen in Him. We are made accepted in Him. We are complete in Him. The Father sees us only in Him. In His name we pray and receive the answer to our prayers. People often want to ask a sign from God that their prayers are heard and some important petition granted. We need no other sign than Christ Himself. His smile, His manifested Presence, His loving acceptance, guarantee every other blessing and, having Him, we may well add, “He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things.”

A man of wealth had died intestate and no trace could be found of any will. At last his house was being sold at auction and all its contents. Among the various articles was a picture of his only son, for which nobody seemed to care but a poor old woman who had nursed him when a baby. Eagerly she bought it for a pittance and when she took it home and began to clean the dusty frame she found inside of it the old man’s will, bequeathing all his fortune to the person who loved his son well enough to buy his picture. And so the old lady got the fortune because she loved the son.

Our highest claim upon God is that we are dear to the heart of Jesus Christ and He is dear to us.

VIII. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ signifies above all else the deepest mystery of Christian life, namely, the incarnation of Christ in the consecrated heart. True indeed it is, as the old monk sings:

“Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,

If He’s not born in you, your heart is still forlorn;

The Christ on Golgotha can never save your soul,

The Christ in your own heart alone can make you whole.”

We cannot better express this than in the following eloquent words from a recent article by Dr. Henry Wilson:

“A piece of tin may reflect the light near which it is placed. The glass surrounding the light radiates the light within.

“Just so we many become reflectors of Jesus Christ by coming to Him, following Him closely, imitating His life by the grace of His Holy Spirit, ‘enabling’ us so to do; and further we may in a beautiful and true sense be changed by thus constantly ‘looking unto’ and into the face of Jesus.

“‘We all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord are transformed (transfigured) into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.’ (2 Cor. 3: 18, R.V.)

“But surely the deeper thought and the deeper life is radiating as a lamp the light and life of an indwelling Christ. Paul himself, who, in the passage just quoted, gives us the reflector side of the truth, gives us in Galatians 2: 20, and many another passage, such as 2 Corinthians 6: 16: ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them,’ the radiating side of the deepest variety of the Christian life — the power of an indwelling Lord, Jesus Christ.

“Moses, from whom the last text is quoted, was himself the best example of a soul reflecting the

glory, when he came down from the mount with the skin of his face shining with the light in which he had been living during those wonderful forty days in communion with God.

“But a greater than Moses is the highest example of His own indwelling when He came down from another mount, and ‘His face did shine as the sun.’

(Matt. 17: 2, and cf. Rev. 1: 16), not reflecting, but radiating the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. (2 Cor. 4: 6.)

“A locomotive is standing on the track, just completed; painted, polished, perfect in every part, and the sun at midday shining upon it and making every bit of brass and steel a burnished blaze of glory. But no motion, except that which comes from without as the workmen painfully ‘pinch’ it forward inch by inch with crowbars.

“Another engine is within the shed, grimy and stained with the wear and tear of many a journey. But the fire is lighted in the furnace; the water in the boiler reaches 212 degrees; steam begins to pass into the cylinders; the piston moves; the wheels turn; the engine goes forward. Not by external pressure, but by the force of an energizing power within.

“These two illustrations, the lamp radiating and not reflecting light; and the engine moved from within and not from without, may serve to make the difference between the two great schools of teaching on this subject.

“Three words similar in sound may also serve to accent the difference in degree, if not in kind, between these modes of presenting ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’ — imitation, inspiration, incarnation of Christ.

“For each view abundance of Scripture might be quoted, but our purpose is to emphasize the last as the highest and deepest of all.

“Incarnations and reincarnations are words much used these days and in various senses. To us as Bible Christians the only incarnation worthy of the name is that which took place in Bethlehem of Judea nearly two thousand years ago, and the only reincarnation in which we believe is that which takes place in the heart first and then in the life of all who are ‘born from above’ in the sense in which Jesus used the words to Nicodemus in the third chapter of St. John; Christmas Day repeated daily in human lives; Christ reborn, reincarnated in lowly hearts and yielded bodies; the whole Christ in the whole man,

“‘A living, bright reality.’”

IX. Finally, the Incarnation is a type and pledge of the Advent. The Christ of Bethlehem will soon be the Christ of glory. He who came in humble stall and manger bed is coming in a little while in power and glory, but it will still be the same human form and the same loving Christ, and it is only as we know Him in His fulness that we shall be welcomed by Him then to a place upon His throne. Blessed Christ, so near, so one. God grant that He may be all this, dear reader, to you and me.

“No distant Lord have I,
Loving afar to be,
Made flesh for me, He cannot rest
Until He rests in me.
Brother in joy or pain,
Bone of my bone is He,
More than my nearest, closest friend,
He dwells Himself in me.
Oh, glorious Son of God,
Incarnate Deity,
I shall forever dwell with You
Because You are in me.”

Chapter 7 – The Wonderful Name

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon His kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” (Is. 9: 6, 7).

We have in this chapter a picture of darkness and dawn, and out of the dawn the rising of the Sun of righteousness.

I. The darkness.

The fifth and eighth chapters both close with a vision of gloom. The ninth chapter takes it up with special reference to “the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles, and refers especially to the afflictions of this region in contrast with the great light that afterwards rose upon it. The translation in the first verse of the ninth chapter is quite unsatisfactory. The Revised Version is much better. “But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish. In the former time He brought into contempt the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time hath He made it glorious by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death upon them hath the light shined.” (Is. 9: 1, 2.)

The Gospel of Matthew refers especially to this prediction (Matt. 4: 13-16), in explanation of the fact that the Lord Jesus began His ministry in this region which had formerly been the most blighted section of all the land. The reason why this region was so severely afflicted was because of its nearness to the Syrian and Assyrian conquerors who swept over the land in their periodical invasions, and always struck this section first, and then, when returning, carried with them its captured population in their cruel and victorious train.

After the fall of Samaria and the subjugation of the northern kingdom, this whole country was settled with immigrants from Assyria, and these colonists gradually became mixed with the former inhabitants, so that the moral and spiritual condition of the land sank lower than its external state.

But the darkness of Galilee was but a sample of the deep gloom that rests upon every section of the world where the light of Christ’s Gospel has not come. That pall of darkness rests today on every heathen nation. How dark are their conceptions of our God and Father! How false are their ideals of righteousness and holiness! How hopeless and comfortless is their sorrow and how black the despair that rests upon the vision of the future! The old Saxon sage expressed it well. One night as they sat in the banqueting hall, and a little bird came fluttering in from the darkness, and flew for a little through the lighted chamber passing out at the other end into the darkness again, the old sage turned to the company, that was even then discussing whether to receive the Christian missionaries into their land or not, and said,

“Our life is like this picture that we have just seen. We come out of the darkness into existence, and flutter a little in the light of life, and then we pass out of the light into the same darkness again. We know not whence we come or whither we go; surely we need some one to bring us the light.” So dark, so desolate is this sad world without the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Just as the night lamp seems to make the midnight darker beyond its radiance, so the gladness of our Christmas days and our gospel privileges only seem to bring into more vivid relief the fearful gloom of a Christless world. How sad to think that still two-thirds of its vast population are sunk in just such darkness while we are rejoicing in the light of Bethlehem, Calvary, and the blessed hope of His coming again.

II. The dawn.

“The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined.” “You have multiplied the nation, You have increased their joy; they joy before You according to the joy in harvest as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.” (Is. 9: 2, 3.)

The coming of Jesus Christ has indeed brought a great light into this dark world. When He taught us to say “Our Father who art in heaven,” the whole heaven became illumined with the vision of a God of Love, and all the mummeries of idolatry, like the shadows of the night, shrank away before the rising dawn. The world’s best wisdom has no such conception of God. In all the writings of the sages, in all the libraries of the world, there is nothing to compare with the parable of the prodigal son and the good shepherd, or with these three promises from the lips of Jesus, “Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “He that hears My Word and believes on Him that sent Me has everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” “In my Father’s house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am there you may be also.”

The best light that Jesus gives, however, is what He calls “the light of life,” the light that shows us how to walk and gives us strength so to walk. “I am the light of the world.” “He that believes Me shall not abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

And, oh, the glorious light that He has shed beyond the grave, for “Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”

Ancient superstition hung up little lamps in the tombs of the dead, but their faint glimmer only deepened the gloom of Christless despair. The resurrection of Christ has dispelled the darkness of the grave and made the future of every child of God as bright as heaven. In that blessed light we have learned to dry our tears of mourning and to go forth ourselves into the seeming gloom with a shout of victory.

“Oh, grave, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting? Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The paragraph that follows is a fine picture of the new order of things which the Savior is to

introduce. Reading again from the Revised Version we quote,

“For the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor You have broken as in the day of Midian; for all the armor of the armed man in the tumult and the garments rolled in blood shall forever be for burning, for fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder,” etc. (Is. 9: 4-7). The idea is that the coming of this King is to change the old order of the world. The weapons of war shall be burned to ashes, the din of strife shall pass away in the sweet music of the gospel, and the Prince of Peace shall begin His everlasting reign. Instead of the battle with confused noise and garments rolled in blood is to be the birth of the heavenly Babe and the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. A new order of forces is to be established upon the earth, and a King of meekness shall supersede the tyrants of bloody oppression and brutal war.

The very center of the light, He is to dawn upon this dark world as the Sun of Righteousness Himself, the blessed Christ who forms the center of the prophet’s vision and whose birth ushers in a new day in the annals of time.

III. The Sun of Righteousness.

1. The Child. The birth of a child was a very significant thing for every Jewish mother and every Hebrew household. From that early hour when Eve forgot her maternal anguish in the joy of her first-born’s smile, and cried out, “I have gotten a man from the Lord,” the highest hope of every Hebrew woman was to be the mother of the Messiah. This deep national instinct could well understand the exulting cry of the prophet, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” It was true to nature as well as redemption, and it carried in its bosom a deeper and larger truth than even their Messianic hopes could comprehend, for that Holy Child has lifted every other child into new dignity and importance, and forever has made the child-spirit the true type of the heavenly character.

The childhood of Jesus Christ was one of the most charming and attractive features in all His humiliation. Adam, the first of men, stepped upon the threshold a full-grown man, but Adam fell, and dragged the race down with him to ruin and sorrow. Jesus Christ came along the feeble steps of infancy and traversed every stage of the pilgrimage of man from the cradle to the grave; and Jesus has not failed. So dear to Him and to the thought of God is this feature of His character that even amid the exaltation of His heavenly throne, He is still worshiped as “thy Holy Child Jesus.” There is something in Him which is as simple as childhood, and He Himself has said, “Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receives Me, and he that receives Me receives Him that sent Me.” In some mysterious sense a little child is the truest image both of the Father and the Son.

2. The King. For this Child is born to be a king. “The government shall be upon His shoulder.” This means not only the government of the universe but the government of our lives. He is the true Sovereign, and the only One that can ever rule this world so as to realize for it its true ideal of blessing. Man has tried the government of monarchies and they have all failed. He is again trying the government of democracies, and they will also fail. The last vision in the Apocalypse is a lot of commonwealths without crowns, and they are all arrayed against the Lord. No, republicanism is not going to do it any more than despotism. The true King is God’s Holy Child Jesus, of whom the older prophet had already sung, “He shall judge the people with righteousness and the poor with judgment.

In His days shall the righteous flourish and abundance of peace so long as the moon endures. He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him.” Dear reader, is He your King? Have you committed the government of your life to His hands and crowned Him “Lord of all”?

3. The Wonderful. “His name shall be called Wonderful.” The Hebrew word literally means “a miracle.” The idea underlying the verse is the supernatural. His birth was supernatural, but all His works and ways are to be supernatural, too. He has projected into human history a higher plane, and under His administration we are to expect not the ordinary laws of cause and effect, but the transcendent working of an Almighty hand, superior to all methods and means and prepared to interpose the supernatural wherever it is needed for the accomplishment of the great purposes of His redemption. What an inspiring thought this is! We so easily fall into the old ruts and get accustomed to the trend of things that we forget that the very idea of Christianity is something above the common, beyond the natural order of things, and involving the wonderful working of our God.

Dear friend, is this Wonderful One in your life? Have you anything supernatural in your religion? Is your salvation a new creation and a miracle of grace? Is your spiritual life superhuman and divine? Has He touched your body with His miraculous power? Have you looked to Him to answer your prayers, to overcome your difficulties and to use your ministries by His wonderful providence and His almighty Spirit, so that your life will be a supernatural witness to that supernatural Book which the devil is trying today to reduce to a mere collection of human documents and ancient literature?

The very point of the conflict that is going on today touches this question. Satan, with the help of modern scholarship, is trying to eliminate the supernatural from the Bible, from the story of Jesus of Nazareth and from the church of God. Our young people are being educated in the schools today to apply the doctrine of evolution to everything and to discard the miraculous story of creation and all that is accessory to it. Oh, that we might rise to the issue, and by a supernatural faith and a supernatural life might prove to the world that this Book is indeed supernatural and divine, and that His name is truly Wonderful!

4. The Counselor. The greatest of Israel’s kings, was greatest in his wisdom, but “a greater than Solomon” is here. The royal Babe of Bethlehem is the wisdom of God. Nothing is more wonderful in the life of our Lord than the quiet, instinctive wisdom with which He met every situation and every difficulty. No victory was more impressive than that last day in the temple court, when the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and others came to Him in succession, determined to confuse Him with their fractious questioning, and with calm, imperturbable wisdom He silenced them one by one, until they were glad to slink away from His majestic presence, and “no man after that presumed to ask Him any more questions.”

The blessed Counselor is not only wise for Himself but He is able to give us wisdom. How often a single step in life is the turning point of blessing for all the future. To know just what to do is so important. All night long the disciples toiled at their nets and got nothing, but when the morning came all they needed was just one word of guidance, “Cast your net on the right side, and you shall find;” and lo! the fish came crowding to their nets.

Jesus Christ is our Counselor, and if we surrender our fancied wisdom and trust His guidance we

shall not be allowed to err but shall be guided in judgment and kept from stumbling.

5. The Mighty God. This King is no mere human potentate, but the omnipotent One, and all His power is at the service of His people, but His power must be claimed by faith and prayer. Do we know Him in His almightiness, and have we allowed Him to clothe us with His mighty power and make our lives efficient through His strength?

6. The Father of Eternity. This is the correct translation of the phrase. It does not mean that He takes the place of the Father among the persons of the Deity, because He is not the Father, but He is the Father of eternity; that is to say, all His plans and purposes are everlasting, and when we take Him in our lives all our ways take hold on eternity. Earthly kings must pass away. The very benignity of the reign of a Josiah only made his death the more distressing. But this King is everlasting, and when we receive Him, He makes our lives eternal, too. How sad to think of friendships formed only to be severed; plans conceived and executed only to be buried in the tomb, and results that are as ephemeral as our mortal lives! How sublime the Psalmist's prayer, "Lead me in the way everlasting!" This is what the Father of eternity will do for us:

Take from us the things that wither and decay,

Give to us the things that cannot pass away,

And lead us in the way everlasting.

7. The Prince of Peace. This is His sweetest gift, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." This is His bequest to us, and the prophet tells "of the increase of His government, and of His peace there shall be no end."

Shall we take Him for the increase of His peace, and in order that we may have it, shall we also give Him the increase of the government? So shall we find as we surrender to Him all our life that He will make real to us His gracious promise, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me who am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls."

Chapter 8 – The Parable of the Vineyard

“Now will I sing to my beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.” (Is. 5:1.)

The fifth chapter of Isaiah is a sort of parable in poetry and song very similar to one of the parables of our Lord, as recorded in the twenty-first chapter of Matthew. This parable was followed by a series of woes addressed by Christ to the Scribes and Pharisees, just as Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard is followed by a similar series of woes. (Matt. 23: 13-29; Is. 5: 8-22.)

I. The vineyard.

He describes the selection of the site in a very fruitful hill. Later, in the seventh verse, he tells us that the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. The fruitful hill, where He planted this vineyard, was Mount Zion. “He fenced it.” This, no doubt, refers to His separation of Israel from the nations, the restrictions and safeguards He placed around them through the law and ordinances which He gave to them and the peculiar isolation of the land and the people from all other peoples.

“He planted it with the choicest vine.”

This refers to the oracles of God, the Word of revelation which He gave to them and all the covenant privileges and blessings which He committed to them. The tower and the winepress which follow are part of the picture of the vineyard and still further refer to God’s provision for the spiritual culture of the chosen people and the blessed fruit which He expected to come from the love and grace invested among them. This is no new figure, but a very familiar one in the Old Testament. “You have brought a vine out of Egypt,” says the Psalmist, “You have cast out the heathen and planted it. You prepared room before it and caused it to take deep root and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea and her branches unto the river. Why have You then broken down her hedges so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood wastes it and the wild beast of the field devours it.”

So Jesus uses the same figure of His own people. “I am the Vine, you are the branches.” The richest and most valuable of all the products of nature is used to represent the richest of God’s graces to His people. But just as the devil has perverted the vine of the earth to the basest and most destructive purposes, so the vine of the Lord’s planting has been assailed by the adversary and turned aside from its divine purposes through the unfaithfulness of men.

II. The wild grapes.

And so the prophet quickly turns from the beautiful vision of the divine Husbandman and His care for His vineyard to the failure of the vineyard. (Is. 5: 2.) “He looked that it should bring forth grapes and it brought forth wild grapes.” The peculiarity of the wild grape is that it is purely natural, an ungrafted fruit. Therefore it represents most fittingly the quality of all mere natural and human goodness. Human nature can only produce wild grapes; luxuriant and beautiful the vine may seem, but the fruit is

worthless. So are all the fruits and graces that grow upon the stalk of humanity. It is only when it is cut back and Christ is grafted into the stalk of our old human nature that there is any good in us. All the failures of the Old Testament were intended to demonstrate this fact, and still men are looking for the development of goodness through education and Christian endeavor instead of through fellowship with the cross of Jesus Christ and entering into His death and resurrection life.

The prophet then proceeds to describe these wild grapes by a series of woes which differentiate and distinguish the various forms of sin in a picture which is as true today as it was in the days of Isaiah.

1. The first of these is greed. Each of these specifications begins with a woe.

“Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, until there be no place that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.” The spirit of monopoly had begun in Isaiah’s time, and the men of great wealth were buying up the whole land and laying it out in vast estates, so that the common people were crowded out of house and home, and the soil that the Creator gave for the support of the people was being used for the luxury of the proud.

Isaiah was not a socialist, but the whole spirit of divine legislation is against selfishness, greed and monopoly. It is no sin to be wealthy, but it is a fearful sin to absorb wealth in the spirit of greed and spend it in selfish luxury. A true citizen will always regard his wealth as a trust for society and his fellow men. There is nothing more alarming in the spirit of our times than the colossal fortunes that are being built up and the selfish and godless use that is being made of them by so many.

The apostle James tells us that these are the signs of the last days. “You have heaped up treasure in the last days.”

2. Selfish and sensual pleasure and unreasonable and unseasonable indulgence in appetite and sensual enjoyment. “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, until wines inflame them. And the harp and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands.”

It is not so much the sin of drunkenness that is here condemned as the sin of pleasure-seeking, of which drinking is a part. These devotees of self-indulgence give up the whole day as well as the whole night to feasting. The effect of this voluptuous life is the deadening of conscience and all spiritual life. “They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands.” It was the same condition of brutal sensuality which the prophet Amos denounced in the Northern Kingdom, “That lie upon beds of ivory and stretch themselves upon their couches and eat the lambs out of the flock and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.”

A life of self-indulgence deadens every high and holy feeling of the heart and makes men selfish and indifferent to God and the claims of their fellow men. They rest in their delicious dream of security, until suddenly the sky darkens, the crash comes and the fearful picture of Isaiah is fulfilled. “Therefore hell has enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure and their glory and their

multitude and their pomp and he that rejoices shall descend into it.”

3. Presumption. “Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity and sin as it were with a cart rope: that say, let Him make speed and hasten His work that we may see it and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come that we may know it.” (Isa. 5: 18, 19.) These are the scoffers who the apostle Peter says shall come in the last days saying, “Where is the promise of his coming?”

They were abroad in Isaiah’s time. They made light of the prophet’s message and the prophet’s word. They put aside all finer fears and feelings and drew iniquity with cords of vanity and sin with cart rope. They hardened their hearts in brutal atheism and laughed at the idea of God, righteousness and judgment to come. They saw no sign of the coming tempest, and in their fool’s paradise they went on in reckless defiance of God and man. So still men sometimes harden their necks against the warnings of heaven and God sits in the heavens and laughs, for He sees that their day is coming. It does not often happen that these reckless men are permitted to repent. Like Korah, Dathan and Abiram in the days of Moses, they are permitted to work out to the full the judgment of heaven.

4. False teaching and perverted moral ideas. “Woe to them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” This is another class of moral evils. It is a very subtle form of sin and a very serious one. It is the false philosophy, poetry and religion that come as angels of light and aim at the perversion of the human conscience and the obliteration of all true convictions of right and wrong. It insidiously seeks to undermine virtue by painting in the poetry of passion the charms of license and the delights of sin. It makes the beautiful, rather than the true, the aim of life and subverts the stern authority of God’s Holy Word and makes it all a myth and allegory.

It is abroad today in the poetry of passion, in the popular novel, in the meretricious theater, in the suggestiveness of fashion, in the easy manners of society, in the mixed conditions of the church itself, in the false teachings of apostates cloaking over sin through ecclesiastical indulgence, in the gauzy sophistries of Christian Science, which do away with all real moral principles; and still more, in the unholy mysteries of Theosophy, Spiritualism and occult science that are pouring over us from the Orient with its filthy tide. Our modern literature, our modern plays, our modern society are full of it. The word ‘sin’ is being eliminated from the popular ethics of our day, and compromise, expediency and sentimentalism are taking the place of God’s eternal law and the claims of conscience and righteousness. God says to all these things, “Woe to them that call evil good, that put darkness for light and bitter for sweet.”

5. Drunkenness. “Woe to them that are mighty to drink wine and men of strength to mingle strong drink.” It is not so much the vice of becoming drunk that is here denounced as the power to drink like a beast and not get drunk. It is the sensual animalism that can load itself with liquor and lead others into stupid, beastly insensibility, and yet glory in its own self-control and ability to drink without limitation. This is downright beastliness, and yet the picture is not hard to find in our Christian lands, which, above all other lands, are blighted and disgraced with the curse of drunkenness. The woe that Isaiah here pronounces is one that reverberates through all the centuries of the corridors of time, all the vaults of hell. It is the saddest wail ever extorted from human sin and sorrow. It is indeed the devil’s most dreadful curse upon lost humanity, and fearful indeed will be the punishment of every man and woman that has any part in spreading it among his fellow men.

6. Self-conceit and pride of intellect. “Woe to them that are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight.”

These are the men that had no need of the counsel of Isaiah or the Word of God. They were a law to themselves. The generation is not yet extinct. Pride of intellect, self-sufficiency, all human culture: these form the greatest obstacle to the reception of the Word of God, and it is forever true that “if any man will be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise, for He takes the wise in their own craftiness.” How very sad that very much of the culture of even the present age is arrayed against Christianity. It is because man hates to acknowledge his own ignorance and nothingness and take his place at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him. Therefore the mysterious words of Jesus Christ are always true of the followers of the kingdom of heaven, “I thank You, oh, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hid these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”

7. Unrighteous judgment. There is one more class here described, although they are included in the last woe. “Which justify the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him.” (Is. 5: 23).

Perverted judgment for the sake of gain, to wrong the innocent and to whitewash the vile: these were the characteristics of men in high places in Isaiah’s time; and God denounces their wickedness in the most severe and unmeasured terms. When the fountains of justice are corrupted and the very courts of law become market places for bribery, violence and oppression, then the very life of a nation is in peril.

III. The harvest.

Therefore the prophet can no longer keep back the vials of God’s wrath, and the most vivid metaphors are used to describe the coming judgment. It will be like the devouring fire as it sweeps over the prairie stubble. “Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel.

It will be like the terrific earthquake as it rends the mountains. “Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against His people and He has stretched forth His hand against them, and has smitten them and the hills did tremble and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away but His hand is stretched out still.”

It will be like the invasion of a desolating army as it sweeps like a whirlwind over the plains. “And He will lift up an ensign to the nations from afar and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly; none shall weary nor stumble among them, none shall slumber nor sleep, neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses’ hooves shall be counted like flint and their wheels like a whirlwind.” (Is. 5: 26-28).

It will be like the roaring of a pack of lions as they leap upon their prey. “Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yes, they shall roar and lay hold of the prey and shall carry it

away safe and none shall deliver it.” (Is. 5: 29.)

It will be like the raging tide as it sweeps away the barriers and breaks over the land in desolation, “And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea.” (Is. 5: 30.)

And it will be like a land over which the darkness of Egypt has fallen. The heavens are black with anger and sorrow and terror hangs like a pall of impenetrable gloom, “And if one look into the land, behold, darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.” (Is. 5: 30).

All this came to Judah in a little while. All this has been coming from age to age to nations and races that have brought upon themselves these woes by the corresponding sins and crimes.

All this came upon Assyria and Babylon in their turn when they at length were down under the storm of judgment. All this came to Jerusalem when she perished under the cruel talons of the Roman eagle, and all this is coming to the civilized nations of today when their sin shall have grown ripe for the winepress of the wrath of God. And just as certainly will it come into the life of the individual, for “they that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind,” and even in the present age to a great extent it is literally true. “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that does evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.”

The evil grapes must find their place in the winepress of the wrath of God. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap; for he that sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Chapter 9 – The King of Righteousness and Peace

“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: but with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” (Is. 11: 2-6.)

This is the third picture of Christ in the book of Isaiah. The first is the prophecy of Immanuel in the seventh chapter, the next the Wonderful Counselor in the ninth chapter. Now comes the great antitype of Melchisedek, the King of righteousness and peace.

I. He is a Shoot from the stem of Jesse and a Branch from his roots. The idea is that the family of David was to pass into decay like an old rotting stem, and out of the ruin was to spring a shoot who should become the heir of David's house and throne. That the Jewish rabbis understood this as a prophecy of the Messiah is evidenced from the Chaldean paraphrase of the old Testament in which this is translated as a son and heir and the name Messiah is used.

There is a fine contrast in the whole paragraph including the previous context in which the king of Assyria is described under the image of a great cedar forest which is to be cut down and utterly fall while the house of David, although seeming to pass into decay, is to be revived by this branch that is to spring from its ruin.

A great principle is here expressed, the principle which underlies the whole Christian system, namely, life out of death. The Lord Jesus Christ came as the outgrowth of a ruined race. He was born of our sinful humanity. He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Humanity had fallen into ruins when out of its decaying roots sprang this new and heavenly Branch which was to “blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit.” Christ Himself was true to this principle all through His life and work. In accordance with it, He went down into death itself and out of the grave He arose in resurrection, life and power to be the Tree of Life for earth's dying millions.

In like manner, our life must come out of death. Every saved soul is a shoot from the decaying root of a lost past. Every sanctified soul is as one resurrected from the dead, and the glory of the new age is to come through the death of the old and the resurrection not only of men, but of nature too.

The Hebrew word “nazar” signifies a little scrubby shoot. The name is applied to the Lord Jesus in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah again. “A root out of dry ground.” This is forever true not only of the Master, but of all His followers.

“The Nazarene” was a name of contempt and humiliation. It signified the last degree of human merit and earthly promise, but from this root has sprung all the hope of earth and all the glory of heaven.

II. He is endowed with supernatural character.

The qualities of wisdom and righteousness here ascribed to this scion of the house of David are not merely remarkable in themselves, but still more remarkable in their source. They are not the inherent qualities of the Messiah, but they are communicated to Him directly and supernaturally by the Holy Ghost Himself. Here is the radical distinction between human ethics and divine righteousness. Man’s morality is the result of natural virtue and ethical culture. God’s righteousness comes down from heaven and is directly communicated by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Therefore Jesus Christ Himself set the example of this new divine righteousness by delaying and suspending all His official ministry until after He received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Although the Son of God, possessing the attributes of deity, He did not exercise them in His own person; but humbled Himself and took the place of dependence upon His Father like any other man, and at length received all the gifts and graces required for His public ministry by receiving the Holy Spirit as we are to receive Him, and living ever after a life of constant dependence by faith and prayer upon God for the supply of wisdom, strength and righteousness for His whole life and ministry. Such stupendous condescension surpasses all other acts of humiliation on the part of our Lord. He consented to be nothing and to receive everything as given Him from above. “I can of My own self do nothing,” He testified. “The words I speak are not Mine, but the Father’s which sent Me.” “I, by the Holy Ghost, cast out demons.” “As the living Father has sent Me and I live by the Father, so he that eats Me even he shall live by Me.” The Master received all His gifts and graces just as we receive them: through the Holy Ghost.

The apostle John speaks of “the seven spirits which are before the throne,”

that is, the seven-fold ministry and equipment of the divine Spirit. This passage in Isaiah presents to us seven operations of the Holy Ghost in connection with the character and ministry of Christ.

1. The Spirit of wisdom. Wisdom is that quality which enables us to use the right means for the end in view. It is the ability to accomplish results, to bring things to pass, to do the right thing. It is the quality which gives success and efficiency in practical life.

2. The Spirit of understanding. This has reference to knowledge in general. One may possess wisdom and yet have a very limited knowledge. On the other hand, one may possess stores of knowledge and yet have no practical sense or sound judgment. It is said of one of England’s kings: “He never said a foolish thing And never did a wise one.”

The Lord Jesus was eminently wise and yet had boundless knowledge. How marvelously He met the snares His subtle foes set for Him and always did the right thing and so answered their ensnaring questions that at last no man dared ask Him anything. At the same time, how marvelous His knowledge of the Word of God. Even at the age of twelve, His familiarity with the Scriptures amazed the Jewish scholars in the temple, and the testimony of all that listened to Him through His public ministry might be expressed in the one admiring reply of the men that tried to arrest Him, “Never a man spoke like this man.”

3. The Spirit of counsel. This is the ability to impart wisdom to others and to guide safely and rightly the steps of those that look to Him for direction. What a “Wonderful Counselor” He is. “When He puts forth His own sheep, He goes before them and they know His voice.” He leads His people “in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble.” They that follow Him shall not stumble, and “the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err therein.”

4. The Spirit of might. The Holy Ghost endowed Christ with miraculous power over all the power of Satan, over the forces and laws of nature and over disease and men. The promise of the Comforter still involves the same power for the followers of Christ. Christianity is not a mere set of harmless opinions but the presence of a living potency that brings things to pass.

5. The Spirit of the knowledge of God. The Holy Spirit was the medium of fellowship between the Father and the Son, and in His light and presence we come to know God and hold intimate converse with Him. Divine things and the Divine Being become intensely real.

6. The Spirit of the fear of God. This means devotedness, godliness, piety, sensitive regard for God’s authority and will, and that absolute obedience and faithfulness of which the Lord Jesus could say, “The Father has not left Me alone, for I do always those things that please Him.”

7. The final quality in this sevenfold equipment of the Holy Ghost is expressed by an extremely significant figure, whose beauty and force are brought out by the marginal reading, “and shall make him of quick scent (or smell) in the fear of the Lord.”

The sense of smell is the finest exercise of all our physical qualities. It approaches more nearly to the spiritual and ethereal than any other. The fragrance of the flower has been compared to the soul of nature breathing out in sweet perfume. The scent in animals is the instinct which detects things as no operation of the human intellect possibly can. The dog recognizes his master and his enemy. The wild bird knows where the warm breezes of the Southland blow, and the difference between the poisoned berry and the wholesome fruit of the wilderness.

And so the Holy Ghost gives to us an instinctive life that is higher than the operation of our reasoning powers. We know God, and we know right and wrong. Yes, and we know His messages, His directions, His intimations to us by those finer touches, those more delicate instincts which do not appeal to our reasoning powers or our coarser senses, but which speak to our consciousness with the authority of intuitions, and which bring to us the certainty that we cannot explain to others and yet could not for a moment question.

How marvelously the Lord perceived the thoughts and characters of those around Him. How often He answered men without their having spoken. How He sensed conditions, characters and things by something within Himself which was as unerring as it was incomprehensible to men. The Holy Spirit will be to us such an instinct and will give to us intuitions of God, of truth, of right, of approaching evil and of the will of God for us which will make us of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, and which will lead us likewise to judge, “not after the sight of our eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of our ears.”

III. The Spirit of righteousness and holiness.

“Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.” The mightiest thing about the Lord Jesus was not His miraculous power but His unimpeachable righteousness. It was this that saved us from the curse which our unrighteousness had brought upon the race. Had He for one moment failed to meet the tests of Satan the race would have been wrecked forever, and the plan of redemption been an irretrievable failure. Just once Moses, the great lawgiver, failed, and that one failure shut him out of the land of promise. With what subtle art the great enemy sought to overthrow the righteousness of Jesus! Could he have but ensnared Him for an instant and lured Him aside from the pathway of obedience upon which He had staked His life and our redemption, what despair must have filled the heavens, and what hopeless anguish must have been the endless portion of our race! But Jesus overcame because “righteousness was the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.” Not for a moment did He even think of or desire aught but His Father’s will, and so “by the obedience of One have many been made righteous.” It was through the Holy Ghost that He stood victorious in this awful test, and that same Holy Ghost is the Sanctifier who still comes to lead us through the same conflict and to the same victory.

IV. The Spirit of judgment.

The righteousness of Jesus Christ, however, was not only personal, it also became a consuming fire to destroy the wicked. Once or twice only in His earthly life did that flame flash forth in the words that withered the barren fig tree, and the woes that scathed the hypocritical Pharisees, who knew the right but chose the wrong. He did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. Therefore, when He read from the book of Isaiah in His inaugural sermon at Nazareth the words of His great commission, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” He closed the book at that point, and left unuttered the last sentence of the prophecy — “the day of vengeance of our God.” The time for that had not yet come, but none the less surely is coming. The fire that melts the gold and makes it pure, burns up the chaff to ashes. The holiness of Christ must either save or destroy. The announcement of the forerunner was, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.”

But there was another fire for those who refused the Holy Ghost: “He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” The Lord Jesus Christ must inevitably judge all evil which refuses to be cleansed by His grace and brought into subjection to His Father’s will.

Therefore, He is here revealed as the reprover and avenger of the wickedness of the wicked. “With righteousness shall He judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.”

This last clause has been quoted by the apostle Paul in a remarkable passage in his description of the coming of the Lord, and especially the judgment that is to fall upon the man of sin, the great antichrist of the last days. After speaking of the mystery of iniquity which already works and which is to culminate in that wicked one who is coming “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish,” he adds, “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.”

This is a literal quotation from our text, and it brings into view the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His sublime character as the leader of the last great conflict and the destroyer of antichrist and Satan.

Let us not, therefore, dream that the mercy of our Savior is a soft and weak emotion, without character or principle behind it. It is a love that can smite as well as save, and of all the fearful pictures of a lost eternity, there is none so terrible and none from which the men that have rejected Christ will so wish to hide themselves behind rocks and mountains as the wrath of the Lamb.”

God save you, dear reader, from that wrath which is but the righteousness of wounded love, of rejected mercy: the wrath of the Lamb.

V. The vision of millennial peace and blessedness.

The picture that follows describes the golden age of faith and hope and prophecy. Human poetry has dreamed of it, but only inspiration has been able to portray it. It is to bring the redemption of the lower orders of creation and the restoration of this sin-cursed earth, as well as the harmony of man with man and man with God. Oh, how the warbling birds will acclaim it! Oh, how the abused beasts of burden, that have groaned under man’s oppression, will almost speak their words of thankfulness! Oh, how heaven will smile as it looks down again upon this paradise restored! “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Is. 11: 6-9.)

“Come, then, oh, Christ, earth’s Monarch and Redeemer,

Your glorious Eden bring;

Where peace at length, no more a timid stranger,

Shall fold her weary wing.”

VI. The restoration of Israel.

Along with this comes the restoration of God’s chosen people, the seed of Abraham. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.” (Is. 11: 11-13.)

There can be no doubt about the literal application of this prophecy. This is not the first restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah, for we are distinctly told that the Lord shall set His hand again a second time to recover the remnant of His people. This also includes the ten tribes represented by Ephraim, as well as the captives of Judah. All are to be united in an everlasting homecoming, such as the sons of Jacob have never seen since the days of Solomon. The envy of Ephraim is to depart, and the vision of Ezekiel 37 is to be fulfilled, and the children of Joseph and the children of Judah are to be one forever. The physical barriers are to be removed, “for the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea.” The political obstacles are to be set aside, for

“He shall shake His hand over the river and smite it in the seven streams.”

This is the river Euphrates, described by the apostle John in Revelation 16: 12, representing the Turkish power, which is to be “dried up that the way of the kings of the East may be prepared.” These kings of the East are the returning children of Israel, who are to go back as the rulers of the Orient when the filthy rover of Mohammedan persecution and corruption shall have been put aside. Then will come the glad millennial song of Isaiah 12 when the universe shall be summoned to celebrate the great deliverance and the advent of the new creation and the millennial age.

In conclusion, what personal application can we make of this sublime vision to our individual lives?

1. As Christ came out of the ruined stump of Israel, so still our Christian life is born out of death, and at every stage we still must trace the principle of death and resurrection.
2. As the Lord Jesus Christ derived His holiness and righteousness from the Holy Ghost, so still the Christian character is not culture but a supernatural gift of the Spirit of God, and must be received by faith and maintained by union with the Lord Jesus through the spirit of holiness.
3. Like Him, we too may be baptized with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of the knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and above all, with that intuitive life which will make us of quick scent in the fear of the Lord, and give us the instinct of holiness and divine communion.
4. There is a sense in which the vision of Isaiah 11: 6, is still fulfilled in our hearts and homes. The lion and the bear, the asp and the adder are not always found in the jungle or menagerie. There are human hearts and lives so like these wild beasts of earth that one cannot altogether wonder that men have thought of the doctrine of evolution and have fancied that our progenitors were monkeys and brutes. But when Jesus comes into human lives, the lion will become a lamb, the poison of the asp will cease to be found behind our lips, the subtlety of the serpent will be taken from our hearts, and our strife and alienation will be healed, and we will walk in love even as “Christ also has loved us.” We have no right to be looking for the millennium unless we have the millennium in our own hearts. We have no business to expect an eternity of peace if we are living in strife and envy now. Let us begin the millennial life here if we expect to enjoy it by and by.
5. The Restorer of Israel will also be our Restorer. How much there is waiting for the “times of the restitution of all things which God has promised by all His holy prophets since the world began.” How much God gives us back here of that which sin and Satan have robbed us, and, oh, how much is

waiting for that glad day when the lost shall be found and “the years that the locust has eaten” will be given back untarnished forever.

How can we have this blessed King of righteousness and peace, and announce and assist His glorious advent which shall make

“This blighted earth of ours His own fair world again.”

Chapter 10 – A Nail in a Sure Place

“And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne in his father’s house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons.” (Is. 22: 23, 24.)

This is the fourth picture of the Messiah in the book of Isaiah. He is presented here under the name of Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, to whom is to be given the key of the house of David, and he is “fastened as a nail in a sure place.”

The old painters used to heighten the effect of their visions of beauty by putting in the foreground some hideous picture of a reptile or a toad so that by the effect of contrast the picture itself might be made more striking through the effect of antithesis.

In front of this picture of our Lord the prophet puts in contrast another figure. It is that of Shebna, the treasurer of the king’s house, a prominent official in the service of Hezekiah, who seems to have been puffed up with such egregious vanity that he had actually prepared for himself a splendid sepulcher in some prominent place, perhaps among the tombs of kings, that he might be buried with great honor. Isaiah is sent to him with a terrific message of rebuke and judgment. “What have you here, and whom have you there,” he asks, “that you have hewed for yourself a sepulcher here, as he that hews out a sepulcher on high, and that sculpts an habitation for himself in a rock?

Behold, the Lord will carry you away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover you. He will surely violently turn and toss you like a ball into a large country; there you shall die, and there the chariots of your glory shall be the shame of your Lord’s house. And I will drive you from your station, and from your state shall He pull you down.” (Is. 22: 16-19.)

It is in the place of this corrupt and selfish official that Eliakim, the faithful one, is to be appointed, and to exhibit in his character and public administration qualities so different and so lofty that the picture of Eliakim soon passes into the higher vision of the Son of God Himself, of whom he becomes the honored type.

Shebna is a fearful example of official corruption, of personal vanity, and of that sordid earthliness that would even make the grave itself the means of exploiting its ambition and its pride. The judgment of God is revealed from heaven against the spirit of worldliness and selfishness in every form.

Some of our Lord’s most solemn parables were intended to show the fearful doom of the man that lives only to amass money and win success in this world. One of these parables is the story of the rich man who added to his barns and storehouses and kept saying to his soul: “Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” But God said: “Fool, this night they require your soul of you; then whose shall these things be that you have provided?” “So,” the Master adds as He points the heart-searching moral, “is he that lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Another of these solemn parables portrays the doom of the selfish worldling on the other side of death. It is the picture of Dives and Lazarus. There is nothing said against the character of this rich man. He was not a bad man, so far as we know, but he simply lived for himself, and this is what we are told of him: "The rich man died and was buried." He had a funeral, as Shebna planned to have, and doubtless it was a splendid one. But oh! the sequel: "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment," and begged that Lazarus, the wretched beggar that had often lain at his door, might be sent with a drop of water to cool his burning tongue. The only fault uttered against him by Father Abraham was: "Son, remember that you in your life received your good things and likewise Lazarus his evil things, but now he is comforted and you are tormented."

Dear friend, are you meeting the great responsibility which increased wealth brings to every man? Are you recognizing your means as a sacred trust? Are you "laying up in store against the time to come" and investing your wealth

"where no moth corrupts, where thieves break not through and steal?"

Over against this hideous character of vain glory and selfishness arises the lofty figure of Eliakim.

I. His name is very suggestive. It means "whom God raised up." Just as Shebna stood for death and the grave, Eliakim stands for the Resurrection, for a life that seeks its portion not in the natural world, but in the new creation which Christ has ushered in. In keeping with this is his father's name, Hilkihah, which means "God is his portion." This also leads our minds to that higher world of which Shebna knew nothing, and to which Jesus Christ is ever opening our faith and hope.

II. His administration is described in beautiful terms: "He will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah." Just as we are accustomed to call Washington "the father of his country," so this good man was a paternal governor over the people, and finely represents our blessed coming King,

"Who rules the world with truth and grace,

And makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness

And wonders of His love."

III. The girdle with which he was to be clothed represents our blessed Lord in His life service. The girdle always stands for service, in contrast with the loose robes that express self-indulgence and ease. While Shebna was living for pleasure, Eliakim was girded for work. Our blessed Master is always represented, even in heaven, as a girded priest, busy in His high offices of intercession and dominion. No sinecure of luxury or selfish glory has He set yonder, but a place of unceasing and faithful ministry as He bears our iniquities, sympathizes with our sorrows and there represents us before the Father, while at the same time He directs all the wheels of Providence from His mediatorial throne in the interests of His people and His kingdom. Like Him, Christian life is strenuous toil and holy activity.

No time for trifling in this life of mine;

Not thus the path the blessed Master trod,

But strenuous toil each hour and power employ,

Always and all for God.

IV. The key of David was given to him. Our Lord applies this to Himself in the third chapter of Revelation, in His message from the throne to the church in Philadelphia : “Thus says He that has the key of David that shuts and no man opens.” There can be no doubt, therefore, about the application of the figure to the Lord Jesus Christ. He carries this key upon His shoulder, which is quite customary in Oriental countries for officials entrusted with the care of some great household. The reference to His shoulder reminds us of the former picture of Jesus Christ in this book: “The government shall be upon His shoulder.” Jesus Christ holds the keys of heaven and earth and hell. How many things He opens for us! the gates of heaven, the gates of prayer, the closed pathway of difficulty, the doors of service, the hearts of men. And how many things He shuts for us; the blessed hand of God which holds us so that none can pluck us out of His hand; the blessed ark of safety, like Noah, of whom it is said, “The Lord shut him in;” the mouths of lions, and the tongues of wicked men and women, which He alone can shut and keep shut.

Blessed Prince of the house of David! Let us give Him all the keys of all the chambers of our being, of all the treasure houses of our life, and we shall find that He is able to keep that which we have committed to His trust against that day.

V. A nail in a sure place. This is a very striking figure, and may refer either to the pegs by which the Arab secures his tent or the iron spikes which they were accustomed to fasten in the masonry of their buildings, at once securing the walls of the building and at the same time becoming a bend on which they hung their valuables inside the house.

1. This is a nail in a sure place. The Lord Jesus Christ is not a guess, a possibility, a theory. He is a mighty certainty. All the assaults of scepticism have only succeeded in establishing Him more firmly in the sure place which He holds in the Word of God, in the hearts of His people and in the plan of redemption. When we trust Him we know that we are resting on a solid rock, and that all else “is sinking sand.” His kingdom is the only certainty of the future. Our best systems of government, our highest forms of civilization, will all pass away, but “His kingdom shall never be removed, and His dominion endures throughout all generations.” The only stable investment for our lives is there.

2. On this nail the prophet said, should be hung “all the glory of his Father’s house.” This does not merely refer to His inheritance in the throne of David, but rather to His heir-ship to all the glory of His heavenly Father. Truly He could say, “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father;” and again, “The Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son.” The apostle says of Him: “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him.” All the glory, all the power, all the authority of the Father has been handed over to the Lord Jesus, so that in receiving Him as our portion we are joint heirs with Him of all the glory of His Father’s house.

3. He is the Head of a new race. "The offspring and the issue" referred to here signify what our Lord Jesus Himself has expressed in one of His last messages in the Apocalypse: "I am the root and offspring of David." He is the real head of David's house, and at the same time the heir of David's throne. David sprang from Him quite as truly as He sprang from David. Still more the truth is implied which the apostle expresses so forcibly in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, where he speaks of the Adam race and the Christ race:

"As all that are in Adam die, even so all that are in Christ shall be made alive."

There are two races of men in this world: one is the race of humanity born from Adam and inheriting his curse and his doom; the other is the Christ race born from the loins of the Lord Jesus, the second Adam, and inheriting His righteousness and His glory. It is only this new race that can ever enter the kingdom of heaven. The old race is doomed and must pass away under the penalty of sin, but the Christ race shall dwell forevermore and inherit all the glories of Christ, its Head.

To which of these do you and I belong, dear friend? Has your life been reborn from the heart of Jesus Christ, and through Him are you the heir of God and the joint heir of Jesus Christ?

4. Still further we are told that they shall hang upon Him all vessels, both large and small, the cups and the flagons, the vessels of the kitchen and the vessels of the feast, the vessels of commonplace need and service and the vessels of high and holy joy and ministry.

A very deep and practical truth is here expressed. Jesus Christ is the source and the supply of all our needs. These vessels represent the needs of our lives, the temporal and spiritual supplies for which we must go continually to Him. The idea is that we do not have the blessing within ourselves. We are not self-contained depositories of grace, but we come to Him moment by moment and hang upon Him our every need; the little vessels of commonplace life and testing, the flagons of higher and holier joy that stand for the hours of rapture and the moments of blessing. The whole weight of our need hangs upon Him, and all our future hopes are dependent likewise upon our Lord and Head.

How blessed to know that there is nothing which we cannot bring to Him!

"There's no time too busy for His leisure,

There's no task too hard for Him to share,

There's no soul too lowly for His notice,

There's no need too trifling for His care,

There's no place too humble for His presence,

There's no pain His bosom cannot feel,

There's no sorrow that He cannot comfort,

There's no sickness that He cannot heal."

Chapter 11 – The King and the Man

“Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” (Is. 32: 1, 2.)

We have here Isaiah’s fifth picture of the Lord Jesus.

I. The King.

“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment.”

In this land of freedom it is hard for us to realize the cruel horrors of ancient despotism. The traveler who gazes with admiration on the splendid architecture of the cities of the past, can scarcely believe that these magnificent ruins were cemented by the blood and the tears of millions of toiling slaves, who spent their lives in unrequited drudgery to adorn the palaces and tombs of cruel tyrants. But an object lesson has just been presented to the world, even in this enlightened age, which gives a touch of realism to these nightmares of history. In the public squares of St. Petersburg we see a multitude of men, women and children assembled to plead at the footstool of their king for liberty and protection, in words so pathetic as to move a heart of stone, and met by squadrons of cavalry, batteries of artillery and a rain of murderous bullets, drenching the snows beneath their feet with streams of innocent blood.

Such a king was the cruel Ahaz of Judah. After years of wickedness and oppression, he at last sold his country to Assyria for an alliance that would protect him from his northern neighbors; and finally crowned the wickedness of his life by setting up a heathen altar in the temple of Jerusalem, and making his own children pass through the fire as living sacrifices to the hideous idol of Moloch. The epitaph he left on the page of history is like a great black note of exclamation, “In the time of his distress he trespassed yet more and more; thus did that king Ahaz.”

Out of the darkness and sorrow of such times rose Isaiah’s vision of the King of righteousness and peace. Like a burst of sunlight or a rainbow arch, after a dark stormy cloud had passed, our text shines with celestial benignity,

“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment.” While, doubtless, the immediate reference of the prophecy was to the good king Hezekiah, who succeeded Ahaz; yet, remotely and supremely, it points to the coming Messiah. He is the only One that can completely fulfil the prophetic ideal. Solomon could draw the picture better than he could live it. The seventy-second Psalm, which probably he wrote, is God’s portrait of earth’s true King, coming, we rejoice to believe, before very long, when it shall at last be true, “He shall judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with judgment. He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. In His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endures. All kings shall fall down before Him. All nations shall serve Him; for He shall deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him that has no helper. He shall redeem their soul

from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in His sight.” (Ps. 72: 2, 4, 7, 11, 12, 14.)

Let us notice some particulars concerning this glorious King.

1. He will be a righteous ruler. Righteousness is the only true foundation for any throne. Selfishness, injustice, political corruption, the prostituting of political influence and high position for ambition or gain can bring only demoralization and ruin to any people. The declension of the world’s decaying nations, as they have been well called, can all be traced to the corrupt fountains where the processes of demoralization began; and all history is but a commentary on the sacred words, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people,” or, Isaiah’s own significant words, “The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.”

2. He will have a righteous court. “Princes shall rule in judgment.” The officers of His kingdom shall be as upright as their King. These officers He is choosing and training today from all the ranks of His redeemed ones. The princes who are to share with Him that coming kingdom are being saved and sanctified, and educated in the church now. As David gathered about him, in the years of his exile, the refugees, who flocked to his standard from all the land, and had but one merit amid all their sins and crimes, namely, that they were true to David, and whom he welcomed, trained, and afterwards appointed as the princes and rulers of his kingdom; so Christ, today, our King in disguise, and almost exiled, is gathering around His standard the sinful men who accept Him as their Captain and Lord, and who are fighting the battles of His militant kingdom. But these shall, by and by, sit down with Him upon His throne and be the princes and rulers of the millennium, and He shall say to one and another, “You have been faithful over a few things, be a ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

3. His will be a reign of love. “A man shall be a hiding place from the tempest, and a covert from the storm; as rivers of water in a dry place, and as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

4. He will establish proper standards of character and conduct. Verses 3-8 describe a condition of things in which the masks of our present social system shall be turned away, and men and women shall stand out in their true character. “The vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the knave bountiful.” All disguises will be removed, all counterfeits will be detected and truth as well as righteousness shall evermore prevail. Today almost everything is false and the world is waiting for its true King to turn society upside down and put things in their true places.

5. The fruits of the Spirit will fill this blessed age with beauty and blessing. “Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest, then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field, and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (Is. 32:15-17.)

II. The Man.

Human life is not all politics. We need more than a king and a good government. We need sympathy, love, help and a human heart to which we can go and on which we can lean with our sorrows and our needs. Back of this throne there is a Man, and His heart is as human as His nature is divine. How real

and perfect that humanity appears in the gospel story of the Christ!

Look at Him in the gradual development of His infancy, childhood and youth — a real child! Look at Him in His boyhood as His mind begins to open to the light of truth and the knowledge of His Father's word and will like any other growing intelligence. See Him in the workshop at Nazareth, a working man like His toiling brothers! See Him as He sits upon the stone at Jacob's well, or sleeps in the "hinder part of the ship" worn out with weariness! Behold the Man as He weeps at Bethany, as He struggles in Gethsemane, as He dies on Calvary! Watch Him as He comes forth from the tomb, in His interview with Mary, in His walk to Emmaus, in His tender treatment of Peter and Thomas, and it will help you to realize how much we owe to the humanity of Jesus Christ. We have indeed in Him "a Daysman, who can lay His hand upon us both." He is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, heart of our heart, brother of our race.

But the prophetic picture is even stronger than this. In the original it is "the man." There is but one Man who fully represents the race; one Man who has made it acceptable to God, and forever shall sit upon the throne of the universe in our likeness and our nature. He is the Son of Man, the Man above all other men who has met our obligations, paid our debts, settled our liabilities, worked out the problem of our salvation, and redeemed, and restored, and glorified the human race.

Three things are predicated of this wondrous Man in the prophet's vision.

1. He is a "hiding place from the wind and a refuge from the storm." He is a refuge from our guilt and sin. He saves us from the wrath of God and the penalty of our guilt. As a man He bore for all men the punishment of sin, and by accepting His atonement we are free. This is the old gospel of substitution. But there is no other way to escape the tempest which is surely gathering against all unforgiven sin, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men" and the sentence is "tribulation, anguish, indignation and wrath upon every soul of man that does evil." But this Man has come between us and our sins. For every soul that will receive Him, He offers a shelter, not only from the judgments of God but from the accusing of Satan, and the very memory of our own heart and the condemnation of our own conscience.

He is a "hiding place" from temptation, "a way to escape" into which we may run and hide while He meets the devil for us as our conquered foe.

He is a "hiding place" from our sorrows, a refuge from the storms of life, and a comforter and deliverer in every hour of trial and of need. Is there any one who reads these lines in a place of difficulty, perplexity or extremity, where all other help has failed? where you have lost confidence in yourself and no human hand can save and no human heart may care? There is One who loves, who understands, who pities, who can take us at our worst, and turn the curse into a blessing, and change the shadow of death into the morning of hope and victory.

Indeed, Christ cannot do much with us until we reach the end of ourselves. The greatest victories of His grace come to us when we reach the end of self.

A writer tells of the origin of the chrysanthemum; that the first chrysanthemum sprang from an abortion in the vegetable world. A little plant, that bore only leaves, failed through some blight to bring a leaf

to perfection, and instead it grew into a tinted form half way between a leaf and a flower. A gardener caught the freak of nature and developed it until it became the glorious autumn flower which almost rivals the rose itself in variety and splendor. It was out of its failure that the new life was born. And so it is when we come to the place of despair we often emerge on the higher plane of resurrection life and victory. The same writer tells of a beautiful trailing plant that also owes its beauty to a similar cause. In its former life it was a stout and self-contained shrub, but under the stress of a storm its roots were almost washed away; and it was left trailing and perishing on the ground. Then it began to lean upon a supporting trunk, and gradually crept up its side until it developed into a trailing plant, slender and unable to support its own weight, but trained into forms of rich beauty and delicacy.

Even so, when we lose our strength, and are unable to stand alone, we grow into new strength by learning to lean on Him. Let us bring to Him our weakness, our sin, the things that no one else will take, and we shall find a friend who will do for us what no other friend could do, and turn life's failures into heaven's triumphs.

2. "As rivers of water in a dry place." Christ is the fountain of refreshing. These rivers of water represent the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit which all spring from Him. We know something, perhaps, of that heavenly Comforter. Perhaps He led you to the Savior and brought you the sense of His forgiveness and acceptance. But there is much more for you. Perhaps He has come to abide in your heart as a personal indwelling presence. But there is still much more for you. There are rivers of living water. It is one thing to receive the Spirit. It is another thing to be filled with the Spirit in every avenue of our being and in every attribute of His being. It is still another thing to have these rivers of water in a dry place. We expect the Holy Spirit to come to us in the high places of life, in the closet, in the sanctuary, in the hour of holy ecstasy. But life is largely made up of very different places, hard places, places of toil, failure, conflict, desertion, discouragement. These are the dry places where the rivers of water are promised to flow. Do we need them?

Have we received that blessed Comforter, who gives zest to drudgery, joy in sorrow, and enables us even to glory in tribulation? Have we, with Achsah learned to claim not only the upper springs of heavenly communion and high achievement, but the nether springs that run through the streets of toil, the marts of trade, the monotony of the kitchen and the pain and agony of sickness, bereavement and wrong? All this is for us in the friendship of the Man of sorrows, the Man that not only knew what sorrow was Himself, but still comes to be with us in our sorrows too.

3. The "shadow of the great rock in a weary land." This speaks to us of quietness and rest. Life is not all in the open. It needs its quiet hours, the place of retreat, silence and shade. Have we found and proved this promise?

"The Lord is your shade upon your right hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night."

The figure of a great rock is beautiful and expressive. A little rock becomes heated in the burning sunshine and only heats you the more. But the great rock absorbs the heat on one side, and has on the other the cool shade where you can sit down and be refreshed and rested. So human friends are like the little rock, filled with their own troubles, and with little leisure or sympathy for us. But He is always at leisure to hear our complaint and bear our burden. In that night when the shadow of the

cross was hanging heavily over His heart, not one word escaped His lips about His troubles, but His own message was,

“Let not your heart be troubled.” It is not until we reach the dry place and the weary land that we ever know the preciousness of Christ and the sympathy of this blessed Man.

In conclusion let us not forget that if Jesus has been all this to us He expects us to be all this to others. Are we places of refuge to whom poor sinners come? Are we rivers of water refreshing the sad lives that are all around us?

Are we as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land to the fainting pilgrims who need our sympathy and help? Lord, help us to know this blessed Man and to minister Him to a broken-hearted world.

Chapter 12 – Quietness and Confidence

“In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and you would not.” (Is. 30: 15.)

The historical setting of this chapter furnishes the key to its spiritual meaning. In the days of Isaiah two great empires were contending for the control of the world, Assyria on the east and Egypt on the west. When they met in conflict, the battleground was frequently the Mediterranean coast, and the small states in that region were the chief sufferers in the clash of arms, and were often ground to powder between the two millstones as they came together. The result of all this was a constant diplomacy on the part of these small states, aiming to combine against their formidable oppressors and to join forces with one or the other as it might seem most politic.

The kingdom of Judah had suffered much from these alliances. God does not love human politics and His prophets ever protested against these compromises with the arm of flesh.

At this time the Jewish’ politicians were advocating an Egyptian alliance against the increasing power of Assyria, whose invading armies loomed large in the vision and the fears of the people. Isaiah used all the energy and force of his glowing tongue to prevent this move which was both bad politics and bad religion. So far he had failed and already the ambassadors of the court had gone down to Egypt to arrange for an alliance with Pharaoh. The prophet was commanded to hold this up to ridicule and say that Egypt should help in vain. To give more emphasis to his warnings, he had a great sign made and wrote upon it in the public view as a sort of epigrammatic caricature of Egypt,

“Blusterer that stands still and does nothing.” He told them that the Egyptians would fail them and that the compromise would only bring them into deeper trouble. All this really came to pass. Pharaoh had more than he could do to take care of himself. An Ethiopian invasion came down from the upper Nile, defeated the armies and burned the king alive, and the ambassadors of Judah returned humiliated and disappointed. Meanwhile, the Assyrians, provoked by all this temporizing, as soon as they got through with their eastern troubles, swept down upon the Mediterranean coast and were soon encamped about Jerusalem. All that Isaiah’ had prophesied had come to pass.

How vividly these texts stand out in the light of history. “For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; in returning and rest shall you be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength, and you would not, but you said, No; for we will flee upon horses.” They refused to take counsel of God and quietly rest and trust in Him, and they said that they would turn to the cavalry of Egypt. With bitter sarcasm the prophet answers, “We will flee upon horses; therefore shall you flee: and, we will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall you flee; until you be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain and as an ensign upon a hill.” (Is. 30: 16, 17.) The help of Egypt was to fail them and the Assyrians to pursue them until they had learned no longer to lean upon the arm of flesh.

But in their distress, God would not forsake them. Beleaguered and besieged by a cruel enemy, His presence would still be with them, comforting, teaching, guiding, cleansing, and at last delivering them. “Therefore will the Lord wait,” he says, “that He may be gracious to you; therefore will He be

exalted that He may have mercy upon you.” (Is. 30: 18). How tenderly will He comfort them in the hour of their distress. “He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry; when He shall hear it He will answer you.” (Is. 30: 19.) He will not keep back the suffering. “The Lord will give you the bread of adversity and the waters of affliction,” that is, the scant fare of a besieged garrison, but He will make all this the means of deepest teaching, for he adds, “Your teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more, but your eyes shall see your teachers.” (Is. 30: 20.) And so near will He come to them that they will learn to know His voice and follow His direction now instead of their own fleshly counsel and self-sufficient wisdom. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, This is the way; walk you in it when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.” (Is. 30: 21.) Better still, their trials shall bring cleansing and righteousness. They shall throw away their idols and dishonor their images of silver and gold and their sorrows shall be a purifying fire as God intended. Then when all this shall have been accomplished, will come their deliverance.

The picture that follows is one of a beleaguered city set free and a land oppressed with invading armies once more bearing its harvests and covered with its waving orchards and feeding flocks in large pastures and undisturbed tranquility. Instead of scant supplies of water, rivers and streams of waters shall flow from hill and valley. Instead of darkness and gloom, “the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be as the light of seven days in the day when the Lord binds up the breach of His people and heals the stroke of their wound.” (Is. 30: 26.)

Then follows the sublime description of the tempest of wrath and judgment with which God shall come down against their enemies like the lightning flash and the devouring fire; like the overflowing flood; like the lion defending its young from the foe; like the mother bird fluttering over her nest and guarding her young, and out of the terror of the scene rises at length the joyful sound of praise from a happy and redeemed people, “You shall have a song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept and gladness of heart as when one goes with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel; and the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard and shall show the lightning down of His arm; for through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down which smote with a rod.” (Is. 30: 29-31.)

Isaiah has told us in a later chapter how all this came to pass, and how in the very height of his pride, as the Assyrian with scorn and blasphemy demanded the surrender of the city, the angel of the Lord came forth and in a single night, by one touch of his awful wing, smote down to death a whole army of 185,000 men. And in the book of Psalms we have the record of the songs they sang. The forty-sixth Psalm no doubt celebrates this great deliverance.

“Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He has made in the earth. He makes wars to cease unto the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in sunder; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (Ps. 46: 8-11.)

All this has a personal meaning for our individual lives. The story of ancient Israel is reenacted in Christian experience still and the lessons of this precious chapter are among the richest and most practical that many of us have ever learned.

I. Our trials.

We too are placed in circumstances of difficulty and danger, even as they, but these are not accidents, but divine ordeals intended to test our spiritual character and bring God into our lives. There are no accidents for the children of God, but all things come through a divine plan and a divine permission, and if rightly met “all things work together for good to them that love God.”

How are we using our trials? Do we become vessels for Him to fill with His larger blessing, or do we let them come in vain and shed the bitter tears of sorrow and find no fruit in compensation?

II. The danger of trusting in the arm of flesh.

For us, as well as for them, there is still the danger of going down to Egypt and looking to men instead of God for help. Egypt for us represents the world with its resources, its compromises, its empty promises of aid. God is very jealous of His people’s confidence. He may use second causes as His means and instruments but He always wants us to look to Him as the great first Cause and commit our way to His hands and then leave Him to deliver with or without the help of man.

III. Quietness and confidence.

This is the attitude in which we should meet every trouble. “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” This is true even in the plane of human reason. It is the man that keeps a cool head and holds himself in tranquil selfcommand that carries his vessel through the stream and his army through the forlorn hope. It is true in spiritual emergencies. “He that believes shall not make haste.” The first thing to do when trouble comes is to be calm and look to God before we think a thought or take a step in our own wisdom. Confidence will bring quietness. It is unbelief that makes us restless and leads us to rush to the first expedient that comes to our mind instead of waiting upon the Lord to show us the way and interpose with His help.

IV. The restlessness and recklessness of unbelief.

“And you would not but you said we will fly upon horses.” And so God sometimes lets us have our way. We refuse to leave ourselves in His hand. We rush hither and thither in our great excitement and like them we find that they that pursue are swift. Our expedients fail. Our resources prove unsatisfactory. Our friends are powerless and at last our condition is worse than at the first.

V. God waiting.

Meanwhile God withdraws and waits until we get through our restlessness and are ready for His help. He does not leave us in our emergency but He lets us alone to learn our lesson and come to the place where He can really help us and we will let Him. There is nothing more touching than God’s waiting love. When Israel refused to follow Him into the land of promise and went back for forty years to their wretched wandering, God did not leave them to wander alone, but “in all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them and He bore and carried them all the days of old.” The way was hard, but it was not the way He chose for them. They had gone, in spite of Him, back to the wilderness, but lovingly He went with them and cheered them and sustained them through all the trials of the way until another generation had been born that could understand Him better and follow Him in the path of safety and obedience. So still He comes with us through the weary, wasted

years that we have brought upon ourselves. It might have been all so different. He had a better way for us, but we chose our own and He went with us through it, and even in our folly and our wandering His promise is still true, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Beloved, is He waiting thus for you? Have you refused to take the better things He meant for you, and have you kept Him waiting until you have learned by experience your folly and your sin and are ready at last to let Him give you what He meant for you at first?

And while He waits, He comforts, teaches, guides and sanctifies. He uses our very blunders to show us our folly and bring us to wisdom and righteousness. He turns the curse into a blessing. He teaches us through our troubles and at last He becomes so real to us that we too shall "hear a word behind us saying: This is the way, walk you in it when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left."

"Your eyes shall see your teachers." By our teachers God means the trials, the experiences, the providences that have come to us through our failure and disobedience. We are so apt to think when things cross our inclination that what we need is that somebody else or something else be made right when the truth is that it is ourselves who need to be made right, and until we are right God cannot readjust the things of which we complain. Indeed, they are His file designed to polish and smooth our roughness.

A lady went to Mr. Andrew Murray requesting him to speak to her husband about some matters that were greatly grieving her in his conduct toward her and his family. After listening to her complaint, Mr. Murray declined to speak to her husband, but said he would like to talk to her about her own life. She was much surprised when he insisted that the trouble was with her rather than with her husband, and that her first duty was to get her lesson, her blessing, her quietness and peace of mind with the victory over all these things, and when that was accomplished all the rest would easily come about. At first she was offended, but after reflection and prayer she found he was right and she went to God in humiliation and prayer for her own soul and obtained the quietness and confidence which she needed, and a few weeks later she came back to tell her counselor how God had changed all these things in her life and made them so different that everything was harmonious and happy.

Beloved, the question is not what is the matter with somebody else, but what is the matter with me? The promise to the tried one is, "I will be with him in trouble," and then comes the next promise, "I will deliver him," but we must first have Him with us in victory and then we shall have His deliverance. "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved," is the first stage. "God shall help her and that right early," is the consummation. Let us learn the first lesson, and when we are able to stand unmoved, then we shall soon find God's providence working for our deliverance and relief.

It is possible to go through the most trying conditions unmoved. It is possible to find amid the storms of sorrow a quietness and stillness which we never knew, when all was calm without, and it is this which glorifies God as no mere outward condition of circumstances could ever do.

"There is a peace that comes after sorrow,

Of hope surrendered, not of hope fulfilled,

That looks not out upon a bright tomorrow,

But on a tempest which His hand has stilled.”

Chapter 13 – The Righteousness Man and His Blessing

“Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly; he that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood and shuts his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rock; bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.” (Is. 33: 14-17.)

The outlook of this prophecy is from the standpoint of Sennacherib’s invasion. The prophet represents the land as desolate, the city beleaguered, the ambassadors returning with bitter tears, and the hope of the nation crushed as the Assyrian breaks his covenant and turns back to renew the siege of Jerusalem. But suddenly a voice from heaven breaks upon the scene. “Now will I rise, says the Lord.” God appears upon the stage and in a single night the Assyrian army is destroyed. So tremendous is the impression of this mighty miracle of saving power that the people are appalled. The “sinners in Zion are afraid,” and they begin to ask, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” God has appeared as a consuming fire and although it is their enemies that have perished, yet they tremble at the thought of such a God in their midst and feel as did Peter afterwards when he shrank from the Master’s presence after the miracle of His power, crying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Oh Lord!”

Dr. Adam Smith, in his notes on this passage, introduces a fine figure representing a man looking at a great city fire through a colored glass which neutralizes the flame so that nothing appears but the crumbling pillars and tumbling walls and buildings, and the power that is working the destruction is invisible. But let him drop the glass and look with open face at the scene and instantly he perceives the tremendous element that is working the havoc.

So the people had been looking at the events around them as through a glass that colored their vision and all they could see was the Assyrian coming and going, the mere facts of God’s working. But suddenly God had come so near that the scales had fallen from their eyes, the distorting medium through which they looked at things had dropped, and lo, they beheld the presence of Jehovah like the fire and flame, and they shrank from its terrible power, conscious of their utter sinfulness and unfitness for such holy fellowship.

The prophet answers the question. Yes, he says, it is possible to dwell with One who is a consuming fire and not be afraid of the search-light of His presence. No, it is possible to get so close to Him that our eyes shall “see the King in His beauty and behold the land that is very far off.” But there are moral and spiritual conditions which must precede the vision. It is the man that

“walks righteously,” that “speaks uprightly,” that “despises the gain of oppression,” “that shakes his hands from holding of bribes,” “that stops his ears from hearing of blood,” “that shuts his eyes from seeing evil.” “He shall dwell on high,” and he shall enter into the beatific vision of the glory of Jehovah.

I. The righteous man.

Five things are predicated of this man. They refer to his feet, his tongue, his hands, his ears and his eyes. It is a very realistic picture of practical righteousness.

I. "He walks righteously." His feet are in the right path. The figure of our walk is a common one in the Bible. It describes our whole outward conduct and deportment. It would not be difficult to fill a volume with the divine picture of the path of the saint. Like Enoch he walks with God, keeping step with his heavenly Father and enjoying His intimate companionship and communion.

"He that abides in Him ought himself to walk even as He walked." We are to

"walk by faith." We are to "walk in love." We are to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called." We are to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." How are we walking? What paths are we treading? What footprints are we leaving? Do we go anywhere where He does not go before us, and would not accompany us? Are we walking in the narrow path or in the broad road that leads to destruction?

2. "He speaks righteousness." His tongue is the next object of the prophet's attention. The condition of our tongue is one of the medical tests of health. This man's tongue is right. "He speaks uprightly," that is, as in the sight of God and the hearing of heaven. It is a very solemn thought that just as the phonograph records and keeps the sounds of the human voice and can reproduce our very words in after years, so perhaps yonder God has an automatic mechanism which will reproduce every utterance of our lips and furnish the records of the judgment by and by when "for every idle word that men have spoken they shall give account to God in the time of judgment." The Word of God has much to say about the tongue. It is not merely what we think and feel, but what we say that defiles and sets on fire our whole being. The spoken word reacts upon us with fatal and corroding poison.

Let us bring our words to the divine standard. Is our tongue pure, reverent, truthful, kind, wise and touched with the fire of Pentecost? Does it belong to God? Does it speak for God? Is it anointed of God and consecrated to His service and His praise? Can we meet the test? "He that speaks uprightly."

Christians little realize how much they lose by idle, vain and foolish talking. If we had conserved the strength that is wasted on empty talk, it would add years to our lives. "Let your speech always be with grace seasoned with salt that you may minister grace unto the hearers."

3. Clean hands. "He shakes his hands from the holding of bribes." The political, social and business world are reeking with corruption of every kind. The true Christian scorns all such things, refuses dishonest gain and avoids the popular methods of reckless speculation and unfair if not unlawful business and finance. It is easy to be caught in the whirl of promising ventures and brilliant commercial speculations, the alluring promise of a speedy fortune and enormous profits on trifling investments. These are temptations that beset us on every side. The true servant of Christ will always weigh every transaction not only in the light of conscience and even of human law, but in the light and the spirit of God's Word. Will our business bear the searchlight of the Scriptures and permit us to dwell with the devouring fire and the everlasting burnings, and will our books stand the inquisition of that day when the fire shall burn the wood, the stubble and the hay?

4. Sanctified ears. "He stops his ears from the hearing of blood." We have no more business to listen to evil than to speak it. A righteous man or woman will refuse to hear scandal, gossip and evil speaking. It is perfectly proper when some malodorous story is brought to you by a gossiping friend to refuse to listen unless the accuser is willing to have his victim in your presence. You will always find this a sure preventive and you will never be troubled a second time. The injury that is done to character and reputation in this sinful way is not half so great as the injury done to the people that listen to it and that perpetuate it with their scorpion tongues. It is a blessed exemption to have one's mind and memory free from these defiling streams of uncharitableness and sin.

5. Sanctified eyes. "That shuts his eyes from seeing evil." There are many things to which the servant of the Lord should be blind. One of them is his own virtue. Another is the evil of his brethren, and a third is the vanity and the folly of the world. There are evil things that hypnotize. It was by a look that David was led into his great crime. "Turn away my sight and eyes from viewing vanity," was the wise petition of the Psalmist. "Let your eyes look right on and let your eyelids look straight before you; ponder the path of your feet and let all your ways be established," was the equally wise direction of the sage of Jerusalem.

Beloved reader, how does your life stand this five-fold test? How can you abide the devouring fire and everlasting burnings when all your ways shall pass under the searchlight of heaven?

II. His blessing.

This righteous man has great and mighty promises.

1. Exaltation. "He shall dwell on high." We need the New Testament to interpret this promise. It is more than moral sublimity, more than lofty aspiration, more than a high aim and a noble purpose. It is what the apostle describes in Ephesians 2: 6, "He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

It is a great spiritual transformation that links our life with Christ upon the throne and makes us citizens of heaven. There is our homeland. There we belong more truly than to any place on earth. There are our affections. There our friends are going fast. There is our future and everlasting home.

Are we claiming this high place? Are we walking with our feet on earth but our heads and hearts above? Are we keeping in close touch with the loved ones that have gone, not through the sinful attempts of spiritualism, but by loving fellowship with Jesus Christ with whom we can ever have communion and know that those we love are with Him there? Are we looking at our trials as we shall one day look upon them from on high and truly dwelling above?

2. Security. "His place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks." The righteous man who dwells on high in union and fellowship with Jesus Christ is impregnable. "If God be for us who can be against us?" "Who is he that will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?"

There is nothing that we need fear while we abide in Him. We do not have to fight our battles, but take refuge in our Savior and see Him conquer. Oh how safe they are who have found their dwelling "in the secret place of the Most High," and "abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Of such it is

true, “The Lord will preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.”

3. Sufficiency. “Bread shall be given him; his water shall be sure.” God’s blessing includes all temporal things. He does not promise us the bread of idleness nor the bread of luxury, but sufficiency, and the records of faith have no richer story than the providence of God in common things in answer to His people’s believing prayers.

4. A larger vision. “Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land of far distances.” The spiritual vision is characterized by a life of holiness and obedience. “I know more than all my teachers,” David could say, “because I keep Your statutes.” There is such a vision of Jesus possible to the soul as will make Him more real than all persons and things and give to the heart such utter satisfaction and rest that we never again can want anything else. The historical Christ apprehended by the intellect is one thing, the living Christ known, realized and loved by the heart is another. The vision does not add to His beauty, but it makes Him real to us and from that hour all other attractions fade and all other delights pale before the vision of His love.

“I have seen Jesus and I’m weaned from all beside,

I have seen Jesus and my wants are all supplied,

I have seen Jesus and my heart is satisfied,

Satisfied with Jesus.”

But the vision takes in the whole horizon. “They shall behold the land of far distances.” He will reveal to us not only His beauty, but all that inheritance of blessing which He has for us. “The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.”

There is a land of promise for every saint just as real as the hills and valleys of ancient Canaan and just as large as our faith is able to take Him.

Most people have such a limited range of vision, but God promises to give us wider horizons when we see all the fulness of His purpose for us, and all the glory of our destiny as the redeemed children of God, and the years of His kingdom and glory that lift us above the lesser attractions of the world and sin, and we press on to apprehend all for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus. Shall we ask Him to open our eyes and show us the vision of the “land that is very far off”?

And then the prophet adds, “Your eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down.” God will give us the vision of His work and its blessing and prosperity, and then send us forth to make it real.

5. The glorious liberty of God’s fulness.

“There the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams wherein shall go no

galleys with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.”

This is a very fine figure of the fulness and the freedom into which the Holy Spirit brings the surrendered heart and life. God becomes to us a glorious Lord, and life becomes not a hard struggle like the fight of the toiling rower making his way with strenuous effort through the opposing waves, but like a vessel borne on by the mighty current, making our life spontaneous, victorious and sublime.

Beloved, do we know Him as the glorious Lord? Have we found our place in the mid current of this mighty river of His love and power, and is our life not a desperate endeavor. but a glorious liberty of love and power? Let us grasp the vision and let us rise to meet it.

Chapter 14 – Pentecostal Outpourings of the Holy Spirit

“Until the Spirit be poured out from on high and the wilderness become a fruitful field and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.” (Is. 32: 15.)

The prophet Isaiah is not only a witness to the Messiah but also to the Holy Ghost. It was the touch of the heavenly fire upon his lips that called and consecrated him to his high vocation as we read in chapter 6. And it was by His anointing that the Messiah Himself was to be prepared for His greater ministry as we read in chapter 11. Here we have the picture of a great outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon Israel and the world, and the glorious result of this transforming the wilderness into a fruitful field and making the fruitful field seem to be a forest in contrast with the new scene of fertility and beauty which this great revival would bring.

The air is full of the tokens of revival. The hearts of God’s people are going out in earnest prayer for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We turn with intense interest to this picture of the necessity and the effects of such an awakening.

I. The need.

“Upon the land of My people shall come up thorns and briars until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.” These thorns and briars may well describe the character of every product of the soil of nature. All man’s philosophies and religions are but weeds and only the Holy Spirit can transform the wilderness into a garden of the Lord. Man’s culture and husbandry have failed. Social reform and ethical teaching will not regenerate society. Let us not waste our strength in second-class things, but work with God on His higher plane through the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

But the thorns and briars are not all found in the wilderness of the world, but often in the hearts of Christians and in the enclosures of the church itself. Without the Holy Ghost our life and our work are filled with weeds and our best things run to waste. Our Lord has taught us in the parable of the sower what these thorns are. “Some fall among thorns and the thorns spring up and choke them.” “He that receives seed among thorns is he that receives the Word and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and you become unfruitful.” Or as expressed in Luke 8: 14: “And that which fell among thorns are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection.”

The version in Mark is also instructive. “The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in choke the Word and it becomes unfruitful.” (Mark 4: 19.) What a picture of many of our heart and lives! The strength of our nature absorbed in seeking pleasure, pursuing ambition or amassing wealth, little time for God, the business of the week day encroaching even on God’s Sabbath, the family altar pushed aside and both mind and body so worn with care and pleasure that there is little energy or leisure for private prayer, for the study of God’s Word or for the work of winning souls. The writer met a young fellow one Sabbath morning lately who used to be an earnest Christian worker. He was on his way to business. “How are you getting on?” was asked. “Oh,

very well.” “Are you busy?” “Yes, very busy.” And looking into his face earnestly the question was added, “Are you too busy?” A look of earnestness lighted up his countenance and with an expression of pain he answered, “Yes, too busy, for I am now on my way to business, and it seems as if I cannot help it without giving up my position altogether.”

Ah, Christian brother, take care lest you get too busy. The lives of most Christians today, it is to be feared, are like the old garden grown up with weeds and thorns. Some day you will have to take time to meet the Master. Alas for you if you shall have nothing to bring but thorns!

II. The Pentecostal blessing.

“Until the Spirit be poured out upon us from on high.” This is more than the coming of the Holy Spirit to our individual lives. This is a public outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the church and a special visitation to the individual heart. This is one of the promises of the New Testament, “There shall be days of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” “There shall be showers of blessing.” Such an outpouring came on the day of Pentecost and such seasons of revival were occasional features of the Apostolic church and have been among the richest blessings of the church of Christ in all ages. God is pouring out His Spirit at this time in a very wonderful way in the valleys of Wales and upon the great cities of England. Some of these seasons of blessing are quite phenomenal, having little human leadership or machinery about them and showing the mighty hand of God alone.

Such an outpouring of the Holy Ghost is the best remedy for all the evils of our individual and church life. It will lead sinners to repentance. It will bring men to realize the presence and power of God. It will awaken Christians from their sleep of death. It will honor the Word of God and revive the work of the gospel in all the world and it will bring about a mighty uplift in the work of the world’s evangelization. God is waiting to send us such a blessing. Let us earnestly desire it. Let us prayerfully seek it and let us put ourselves in line with it before it comes.

III. The great transformation.

“And the wilderness shall become a fruitful field.” It is very beautiful to travel through the Western prairies and after hours of sweeping over the arid desert with nothing but the drifting sand and the scrubby sage brush, to suddenly come upon a little town lying like an island of beauty in a sea of desolation, the fields and gardens exquisitely green, streams flowing through every garden and along every highway, and the whole place literally blossoming like a rose. Ask some one for an explanation and he will tell you it is the very same desolate soil that you have been passing through all day, but in this case the only explanation is the single word, “irrigation.” The waters have been brought down from the mountains and the wilderness has become a fruitful field.

Such a transformation takes place in the most wretched and sinful lives when God comes into them with His grace. How we have seen them in these years come from the street, from the saloon, from the depths of sin, haggard, unkempt, with hollow eyes and hopeless hearts, and at the feet of Jesus receive His cleansing touch, bathe in the living water and begin to drink of the fountain of life! How marvelously they have changed! In a few days you behold them clothed and in their right mind; happy-faced girls, manly men, transformed lives literally resurrected from the grave, and entering upon a career of happiness, usefulness and blessing to the world. Hundreds of such men and women today

are leading our rescue missions at home and working on our mission fields abroad and passing on the blessing that has come to them to thousands more. When we think that the coming of the Holy Ghost will bring just such transformations to thousands of the wretched hearts and homes around us, oh, surely we should give ourselves no rest until we seek and gain these promised showers of blessings.

IV. Righteousness and peace.

“Then shall judgment dwell in the wilderness and righteousness remain in the fruitful valley; and the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever. And My people shall dwell in peaceful habitations and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting places.” (Is. 32: 16-18.)

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit will bring righteousness to the wilderness. Even in the social and secular world, conditions will be revolutionized, wickedness will be checked, intemperance, vice and misery will be restrained and the face of society will be transformed. So much is this the case in the recent revival in Wales that the very saloons have lost their business and the courts of justice are without occupation. We are not going to see this come to pass everywhere in the present age. These, however, are samples of what the Holy Ghost can do and what the coming of our Lord in a little while will do throughout the entire world. Oh let us realize it and seek it to the utmost possible extent even in this present mingled condition of human society.

“Righteousness shall remain in the fruitful valley.” This refers to the sanctification of believers and the higher standard of holiness in the church which the outpouring of the Holy Ghost will bring.

The final result of this blessing will be the reign of peace and joy in every heart and home. “The work of righteousness shall be peace.” It is not designed that our life shall be occupied in the constant excitement of religious meetings, but in our hearts and homes and the normal current of duty, this beautiful picture will be realized and “the peace of God that passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Through such awakenings thousands of God’s happy children today at one time entered into the rest of faith and the deeper life which has not only satisfied their spiritual needs but multiplied a hundredfold their power to bless others. Such blessings are waiting the present generation through the coming of the Holy Ghost. Oh that we may seek and find that blessing in all its fulness!

V. The uplifting of our Christian life to higher ideals.

“The fruitful field shall be counted for a forest.” This is a very remarkable expression and the obvious meaning is that so great shall be the transformation of the church, hearts, and of the Christian life of the individual, that the vision we have hitherto known shall seem as nothing in comparison with the blessing that is to come. Even the fruitful valley will be so improved that it will seem as if it had only been a forest before.

One of the worst features of the private and public life even of the people of God is the tendency to sink into ruts and to grow rigid and frigid in the formal, conventional routine of life. The old proverb, “Good enough is never good,” is in place here. No doubt the reason so little progress is made by very

many persons is because they are measuring themselves by old standards and really never getting any further on. When the Holy Spirit comes, He lifts our minds to new ideals and gives us conceptions of things so much in advance of our present experiences that we long for higher ground; the saved become sanctified and the sanctified rise to a life of sacrifice and unselfish service. We see our own shortcomings, our sins of omission of duty, self life, our worries, anxieties and cares, our narrow sympathies, our low conceptions of God, our little faith and our unworthy standards and aims so that we cry out for all the fulness of God, and “forgetting the things that are behind, reach forward unto those things that are before.” The promises of God rise before us with new vividness, the possibilities of a victorious Christian life allure us, and the voice of God is heard crying, “Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?”

Sometimes God permits us to see in some other life the glorious possibilities that we are missing and we rise up to new planes, new ambitions, new visions and new commissions of service for God and man. It was the apostle’s prayer for the Ephesians that they might know “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,” and this was to come about through “the eyes of their understanding being enlightened.” Again he declares in the second chapter of 1Corinthians, “Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, but God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit.” When this vision comes there rises before us the alluring prospect of that better country which Christ is waiting to bring us into:

“Rejoicing now in earnest hope,

We stand, and from the mountain top

See all the land below.

Rivers of milk and honey rise

And all the fruits of paradise

In endless plenty grow.”

To the dull eyes which can appreciate only earthly things, the things of God are clothed with enchanting beauty. The sinner grows sick of his sin, the worldling turns from his elusive dreams, the discouraged and defeated saint takes heart again and our dull, cold Christian life becomes a romance of beauty and blessing.

There is a thrilling story told of a man of great wealth and brilliant genius who had become a leader in the industrial life of the land, and the master of an enormous fortune, but who had no taste for art or music or high things. One day he was called upon by an old schoolmate from the distant land where both were born and who in turn had become illustrious in his profession as a musician. He invited the merchant prince to come to one of his concerts and hear him play on his famous violin, but the millionaire laughed at him and said he had no time for such trifles; he was engaged in more practical things. At last the musician caught his friend by strategy. He took his violin one day to the factory of the rich man, and asked him to make some trifling repairs upon it, as he was a machinist while the other was only a musician. After the trifling work had been done, the musician began to play to see if

it was all right, but before half a dozen bars of music had been rolled off, the millionaire was standing with the tears streaming down his face with undisguised admiration and delight. The music had broken his heart and the musician had conquered him by his wiles. Not only so, the whole factory became demoralized, and as he played on, the entrancing strains gathered clerks, foremen, porters, everybody, in crowds around the door, and at last the musician apologized for disturbing their business; but the great man, wiping the tears from his eyes, said, "Don't stop for the world. Play on; I never knew until this moment how much I had missed out of my life." Poor man, he found that day a new world of sweetness to which he had been a stranger, and his heart longed for more.

In a far higher sense that is what happens when the light of heaven falls upon the heart and we see the King in His beauty and a land that is very far off. Then earthly things pale before the vision of that better country and our hearts long for God and heaven. Oh, if we should go on in our blindness until it is too late! Oh, if some day we should wake to hear "the voice of harpers harping with their harps," and the new song they sing above, and discover at last that we have no part in it, but have thrown our lives away upon the barren, empty wilderness of life, ours would be the eternal sorrow and an irretrievable loss!

Let us ask God to open our vision, to awaken our hearts, to show us the things that are true and good and beautiful and everlasting, "the things which eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor entered into the heart of man, but which God has prepared for them that love Him," and "which God has revealed unto us by His Spirit."

Oh, that the great Revealer might come to us and show us the vision! Oh, that the great Inspirer might come to us and lift our hearts to meet it! Oh, that the great Enabler might come and transform our lives and make the vision real even here as well as in the life everlasting!"

Chapter 15 – Showers of Blessing

“I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground.” (Is. 44:3.)

The Holy Spirit is falling upon His people. An organized religious movement of great power is sweeping over Great Britain and centering at the present time in its metropolis. A still more remarkable spontaneous revival is rolling over the valleys of Wales, and already has brought tens of thousands to God and changed the face of society in scores of communities. In our own land, the Holy Spirit is working with great power in many places. Such tokens give blessed emphasis to the promise of our text and encourage us to expect yet greater things through the outpouring of the Spirit from on high. This text gives us a three-fold picture.

I. The field.

The prophet repeats himself in the familiar form of a Hebrew parallelism, and yet the verses are not exactly parallel when he speaks of “him that is thirsty” and the “dry ground.”

1. “The dry ground.” This means that the Holy Spirit is waiting to come, in answer to the prayers of God’s people, upon the hardest, the deadest and the most discouraging fields. It reminds one of the soil of some tropical country after months of drought when the ground is baked like stone and great fissures sink deep into the soil and clouds of dust sweep over the land with every passing breeze, while the very air seems like liquid fire and no green or living thing remains in forest or field until the monsoons pour down and “the desert blossoms as the rose.”

Such is the transformation that the Holy Spirit brings to a wretched heathen community; to the besotted drunkard’s home; to the heart that has been steeped in sin and hardened with years of daring wickedness, and to the church which has become like a cemetery in its cold formalism while God has been saying to it, “You have a name that you live and are dead.” It is upon just such people and communities that the power of a great revival tells, and God is waiting to work these wonders of His grace and power in answer to our believing prayers.

2. “Him that is thirsty.” This is the promise for the individual Christian. It describes that on which the coming of the Holy Spirit to the individual heart depends. In the natural world a vacuum always brings a current of air to fill, and in the spiritual realm it is just as true that a condition of conscious need never fails to bring supply of God’s presence and Holy Spirit. The writer never can forget his visit to the Telegu mission in India and the extraordinary way in which this promise was fulfilled in the experience of one of the native teachers at Rampatam.

Our little party had just come late on Saturday night and on Sabbath morning we went to the native church with the good pastor. After his sermon, he announced that in the evening two strangers would give an address on the Holy Spirit. It seems that at the time a great spiritual awakening was coming over this wonderful mission. A few years before tens of thousands had been converted, but now they were seeking the deeper blessing, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the announcement of a meeting for that purpose evidently awakened the deepest interest, and a look of expectancy brightened their

countenances.

On returning from the service to the pastor's house, one of the native teachers, a physician, was waiting, and approaching the pastor he said with great earnestness, that he had come to hear about this blessing, for he greatly needed it and could not be satisfied to wait until evening. As we looked at that earnest face, we felt that the Spirit had already fallen upon him and he was indeed thirsty. We all knelt down and began to repeat special promises and this was the first that came to our mind, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground." It seemed to take hold of him and after a few other promises had been successively repeated, he began to pray in his native Telegu. It was one of the most touching prayers we have ever heard. We could not follow the words and yet we could follow the spirit of it every moment. With cries of heart agony, he called upon God, told Him how he longed for this blessing. After a while his tone changed and a look of trust began to overspread his countenance. As he still prayed on, the tone of hope and joy increased and in a little while his face was shining with holy gladness and he was pouring out his thanksgivings for the blessing that had come to him. When at length he was able to stop this torrent of prayer, he turned to us and began to embrace us one by one, and such a look of unutterable joy I have seldom seen upon a human countenance.

The Holy Spirit is just as ready to meet our cry and satisfy our thirst. It would seem as if a condition of intense desire were necessary as a preparation for the blessing. Just as hunger prepares us to assimilate food, so the deep desires of the heart for the divine blessing prepares it to receive that blessing according to a great spiritual law of the fitness of things. Are we thirsting for this priceless blessing? Have we found the fountains of earthly pleasure disappointing? Have the waters of time turned to bitterness? Do we long to rise to the highest things and be used of God in blessing to others? Let us send up our cry:

"While on others Thou art calling.

Let some blessing fall on me."

II. The flood.

The Holy Spirit is compared to water frequently in the Scriptures. The stream that flowed from the smitten rock in Horeb was God's peculiar type of the coming of the Spirit through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. The subsequent history of that stream, that flowed through the desert and could be tapped and opened at any time and made to give forth from its subterranean depths the fulness of supply for themselves, their children and their cattle, is a still more complete type of the deeper fulness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of the children of God. Like water, the Holy Spirit satisfies, cleanses and fertilizes. Nothing else can fill the void of the human heart. Nothing else can take away the power of sin. Nothing else can make the desert to bloom as the rose. Two forms of the Spirit's operations are here set forth, the ordinary and the extraordinary. Even the ordinary work of the Spirit is expressed by the stronger figure, "I will pour water," but His extraordinary ministry is described by a more emphatic figure, "I will pour floods upon the dry ground." These floods represent the occasional outpouring of the Spirit of God in seasons of great revival which the church is witnessing now in many places and which earnest Christian hearts are longing to see everywhere.

Such seasons of mighty blessing are powerful witnesses for God, awakening the attention of a careless world and compelling even the most skeptical and indifferent to recognize the reality and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such seasons, for a time at least, lift up a standard against the enemy and check the prevalence and power of evil as no mere human words or authorities ever can. God becomes His own witness and the scoffer and the sinner are awed and humbled before the majesty of the Lord. Let us pray for such a mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost in our day. We are warranted to expect such manifestations of divine power especially as the coming of our Lord draws near. These are to be the very signs that will herald His return, "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh," He says, "and I will show signs and wonders before the coming of that great and notable day of the Lord."

III. The fruit.

"They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses."

One thing about the grass is the multitudinousness of it. Even the little lawn that fronts your cottage has myriads of blades of grass in it, and each one is different from its fellow. When the Holy Ghost comes in power, He will touch myriads of hearts and multitudes will respond to His call and thousands and tens of thousands of souls will flock to the Savior.

Another thing about the grass is its commonness. It represents those things of the Holy Spirit that touch our ordinary life and make its most secular and simple duties to shine with the grace and glory of the Lord.

Then there is nothing more beautiful than the grass; so fresh, so green and so unfading in its verdure. The flowers may come and go, but the grass is perennial. And so the Holy Spirit brings the blessing that is abiding and covers the life of a Christian, the home, the church, with a beauty and a glory that never can fade.

Another fine illustration of the fruit of the Spirit is the willow by the water courses. The most remarkable thing about the willow is that it cannot live apart from the water courses, and so the Christian cannot live without the Holy Ghost. Indeed, it is absolutely true that the more fully we are surrendered to God, the more utterly are we dependent upon Him, so that we cannot take one step or breathe a single breath apart from Him. The willow follows the water, and when the fountains are abundant, its leaves are green and its beauty unfading. I have heard of a gardener who tried for a year to change the shape of a willow which insisted upon growing all to one side. In vain he pruned and slashed at the lopsided branches: they still persisted in growing that way. One day he took a spade and dug down below the roots of the tree and then he found that a subterranean stream was running on the side to which the willow leaned. It simply followed the fountain that fed its life. He put away his pruning knife and he dug a little channel for the river around the other side of the tree, and lo, next year it grew toward the river and became symmetrical and beautiful without a touch of violence.

Beloved, that is what we need to change the deformities of our lives; not more trying, not more suffering, not more scolding, not more condemning of ourselves, but more life, more help, more love, more of the precious grace of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost. Then our lives will grow to Him by whom they are sustained, and it will be true of us, "Of Him and for Him are all things, to whom be glory forever and ever." Amen.

The prophet next describes the individual blessing that will follow these gracious outpourings.

1. Individual conversion. "One will say, I am the Lord's." (Is. 44: 5.) The Holy Spirit will lead souls, one by one, to Christ. How beautiful it is to read in the account of the Welsh revival of people springing up all over the meeting spontaneously and confessing the Savior they had just found. It was not through preaching, but through personal dealing with the Holy Spirit who was present pleading with souls all over the place, and they yielded and confessed Him one by one just as they settled the great transaction. Any one can be saved the moment he is ready to confess Christ as his Savior: "If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." This is a personal confession directly to God and He accepts it and records the name of the confessor in the Lamb's book of life.

2. Uniting with the people of God. "Another will call himself by the name of Jacob." (Is. 44:5.) This undoubtedly represents the identifying of the individual with the Lord's people. When the Holy Spirit truly leads souls to Christ, they always want to belong to His people. How quickly all censorious criticism about churches and church members disappears and the true and humble spirit turns to the children of God for fellowship, sympathy and help. It is the duty of the young convert to attach himself to the fold of Christ, and although there may be many imperfections in the visible church, yet it is far safer to be inside than outside and all who truly love the Master will want to be identified with some branch of His cause.

3. The covenanted life. "Another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord."

(Is. 44: 5.) This represents that closer covenant into which it is the privilege of the individual soul to enter with the Lord Jesus. Dr. Phillip Dodridge recommends to young Christians to write down their covenant and formally sign it and ratify it, and then preserve it, and he suggests a very solemn form in which the soul may give itself to the Lord and claim His covenant blessing.

There is no doubt that such personal covenants have brought great blessing to those that have faithfully kept them and as we look back upon the records of our own lives we shall find that even where we have failed “He abides faithful.”

4. Higher spiritual blessing. The next clause, “and surname himself by the name of Israel” (Is. 44: 5), seems to express the highest spiritual experiences. Israel stands for much more than Jacob. It marks the second stage of the patriarch’s spiritual life when the Supplanter became the Prince of God. When the Holy Spirit comes, He leads the willing heart in the deeper and highest things of God. He shows the young convert that it is his privilege to be baptized with the Holy Ghost, to receive the Lord Jesus as an indwelling presence, to be delivered from the power of self and sin and to enter into a life of abiding victory, rest and power.

Indeed, these are among the richest fruits of every true revival, and no wise Christian worker will be satisfied until the souls committed to his care have been led into all the fulness of Christ. This is presented here as a voluntary act and as the privilege of all who are willing to rise to it. God does not force His best things upon us, but offers them to our holy ambition.

Shall we, as we realize this mighty promise, rise to it for ourselves and claim, even as we read these lines, these showers of blessing, these floods of power and these glorious fruits for our own individual Christian life and the cause and kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

Chapter 16 – The Holy Spirit and the Gospel

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.” (Isa. 61: 1, 2.)

The New Testament quotation of this verse leaves no doubt of its Messianic meaning. To say that it was only the prophet’s vision of his own inspiration is beneath its obvious meaning and the grandeur of its true application. In this verse the Lord Jesus is personified in anticipation of His future ministry and applies to Himself the language which He afterwards uttered with His own lips in the synagogue at Nazareth. There came a day when the Master went forth from Nazareth after thirty years of quiet, patient toil, to the banks of the Jordan and, offering up His life to the Father and the world in the beautiful, symbolical rite of baptism, received from the open heavens the visible baptism of the Holy Ghost and the distinct testimony of His Father’s voice to His divine Sonship and Messiahship.

Then came forty days of testing and conflict in the wilderness and this led up to a deeper baptism of the Spirit and the commencement of His public ministry. Speaking of it in the context before us, Luke says, “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee and there went out a fame of Him through the regions round about, and He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.”

It was eminently proper that the first public announcement of the objects of His ministry should be made at Nazareth, His former home. Therefore, with deliberate purpose, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and being recognized already as a Rabbi and public teacher, the leader of the services courteously offered to Him the scroll of the sacred Scriptures and invited Him to give some message in connection with the services of the day. Turning at once to this passage in Isaiah, He read the text, and then, stopping abruptly before reading the last clause about the “day of vengeance of our God,” He closed the book or scroll, and sitting down began to offer, as was customary, a few words of exposition and application. His very first sentence awakened the astonished interest of all His audience as, applying the prophecy directly to Himself, He declared, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” There can therefore be no doubt about the meaning of the prophecy and its application to our Lord Himself.

The first lesson suggested by the text and its historical fulfilment is:

I. The Relation of the Holy Spirit to Christ.

This is a subject that is well worthy of the closest study, for it teaches us much practical truth not only in connection with the Master, but also with our own spiritual life. For if He was our Forerunner, and if it be true that “as He is, so are we also in this world,” then the definite steps of our Lord’s experience should be repeated and fulfilled in the lives of His followers. There is no doubt that in some sense the Lord Jesus had the Presence of the Holy Spirit in connection with His birth and His early life. The announcement of His birth stated explicitly, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon you and the power of the highest shall overshadow you; therefore that Holy Thing that shall be born of you

shall be called the Son of God.” Christ therefore was born in His Divine and human Person through the Holy Ghost. Nor can we question whether the wonderful grace and wisdom which marked His childhood and youth were the result of the Holy Spirit’s influence. And yet there came a day when in some entirely new and higher sense the Holy Spirit, like a dove, descended and abode upon Him. From that time there were two personalities connected with the life and work of our Lord Jesus; the Son of God was in direct union with the Spirit of God, and all His words and all His works were inspired by the Holy Ghost. He could truly say, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me for He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.” Indeed, from this time He attributed all His works to the power of the Holy Ghost who dwelt in Him, and one of the very reasons why the sin of rejecting Him was so aggravated was just because it was a sin not only against Him, but against the Holy Spirit who dwelt in Him and spoke and worked through Him.

Now, if this be true of the Master, it should also be true of His followers. If our Lord did not venture to begin His public ministry until He had been baptized with power from on high, and if he attributed all His work to the power and anointing of the Holy Ghost, what folly and presumption it must be for us to try to serve Him by our own resources, gifts and wisdom. Is it applying the parallel too rigidly to say that just as He was born of the Spirit and yet afterwards baptized of the Spirit in the sense of a direct personal union and indwelling of the Holy Ghost, so likewise His people should not only experience a new birth through the grace and power of the Holy Ghost, but should yield themselves, as He did in His baptism, for the indwelling and abiding of the Comforter in the very same sense in which the Spirit came to Him? There is no stronger argument for the scripturalness of this deeper experience which God is giving to so many of His children in these days than the example of the Master Himself.

Beloved reader, have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed, and have you been endowed with power from on high for your life and work even as He?

But this truth has another side, not only affecting our individual privileges as believers, but the whole gospel dispensation. In one very remarkable passage, the Lord Jesus explained to His disciples the reason why He wrought His miracles by the power of the Holy Ghost. “If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons,” He said, “then no doubt the kingdom of God is come near unto you.” It was as if He had said, “If I perform My miracles and accomplish My work by virtue of My own inherent power and deity, and then withdraw from the world after My resurrection and ascension, it might be said that I had taken the power with Me; but if, on the other hand, these ministries and miracles are accomplished not by My own inherent power, but by the Spirit that dwells in Me, and is afterwards to dwell in you and perpetuate My ministry, then indeed the kingdom of God is come near to you. The gifts and powers of the kingdom are not withdrawn by My return to heaven, but they continue permanently through all the future generations of the Christian age, and the Holy Ghost still carries on My work just as truly as I have begun to carry it on during My earthly ministry.” This gives perpetuity to all the supernatural features of Christ’s life and work and the apostolic age and, as some one has said with great beauty and power, it makes the Lord Jesus our contemporary to the end of time. Then we should cease to talk about the apostolic age as though it were a privileged period, for there is but one age, the age of the Holy Ghost, and we are living in it just as truly as the apostles and immediate followers of the Lord Jesus were.

What a blessed reality all this gives to our Christian faith and hope! The kingdom of God has indeed come near to us. It is in our midst, and the promise of the departing Master is just as true as we will allow Him to make it.

“Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age.” “He that believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto My Father.” When this fully dawns upon the conception of the church of God, she will arise to her heavenly birthright, and the promise of Joel will be fulfilled in a more glorious way than has been witnessed even in the past. “I will show signs and wonders in heaven above and on the earth beneath before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord.”

II. The Holy Ghost and the gospel.

Not only does this glorious text give us the revelation of the Spirit in His relation to Christ, but an equally blessed revelation of the Spirit in His relation to the gospel, for the Holy Spirit came upon Christ to anoint Him for the publication of the gospel, and the same Holy Ghost still comes upon the church and ministry for the same purpose and with the same gospel.

What a glorious gospel it is, and what a glorious thing to think about it, not merely as the gospel of Jesus Christ, but as the gospel of the Holy Ghost; for it is not only a proclamation once made by lips that are dead, but it is a proclamation repeated afresh to every soul that will receive it by the very One who first breathed it from the lips of Christ, the Holy Comforter. Some one has well called it the gospel of the Jubilee, for the whole setting of this proclamation is just a figure and the frame of Israel's ancient year of Jubilee.

There was nothing more splendid in all the glorious ceremonial ritual of ancient Israel than the event of the fiftieth year, or the year of Jubilee. It was a great national festival a whole year long, and its one keynote was rejoicing and gladness. With the early dawn of the tenth day of the seventh month, the glad trumpets of the Jubilee were heard resounding from every mountain top throughout the land, and immediately the whole nation set itself to keep the glad holiday for an entire year. Even the fields rested from their accustomed harvest, the workman laid aside the implements of his toil and the very cattle entered into the national rest and rejoicing. Then you could have seen the little family circles all over the land wending their way back to the little cottage, which years before they had been obliged to leave as it was mortgaged and sold over their heads; but on the year of Jubilee all debts were canceled, all mortgages were worthless, all lost estates were restored, and again with tears and songs of gladness they embraced each other on the threshold of their home and felt that they were back to their own again. And as they sat rejoicing under their vine and fig tree, here and there you might behold a son or a daughter welcomed home. They had been slaves in some distant town, or some wealthy family, and had to serve for weary years in payment of some debt or obligation, but now they were free. The year of Jubilee emancipated every slave, and fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, welcomed back the lost one to the family circle. There too, you could have seen the prisoner stepping out from his dungeon and hastening to his home and beginning life again with the assurance that all his liabilities, disabilities and reproaches were blotted out by this glad year of emancipation. It was just a little bit of heaven let down on earth and might well afford a splendid figure of that glorious age of happiness, hope and holy liberty which the Lord Jesus and the glorious gospel have brought to men and which His second coming in a little while will bring to grander consummation.

It is to this our text refers when it says, "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." But indeed, every clause and every phrase has a note of the Jubilee in it; good tidings to the poor, liberty to the captive, joy to the broken hearted: all these are just fulfilments of the ancient type. Four points will sufficiently sum up this gospel of the Jubilee.

1. The payment of all debts. The Jubilee canceled every debt, and so the coming of the Lord has provided for our debt of sin and blotted out our condemnation, and given to us God's decree of righteousness and making us "accepted in the beloved" "even as He."

2. Liberty to the captives. Christ has brought us deliverance from the slavery of sin and Satan, and power to overcome our old hearts, our evil habits, and all our temptations and spiritual foes. Not only is this the Gospel of Christ, but it is the Gospel of the Holy Ghost. Not only was it proclaimed once, but it is made real ten thousand times as men receive Him and let Him work it out in their surrendered lives.

3. The restoration of our lost heritages. The Jubilee gave back the home that had been forfeited, and the inheritance that had been lost; and so Christ comes to us proclaiming:

"You that have sold for naught

Your heritage above,

Receive it back unbought,

The price of Jesus' love;

The year of Jubilee has come,

Return, you ransomed sinners, home."

Not only has Christ proclaimed it, but the Holy Ghost is constantly making it true. He comes to the discouraged life dragged down by its hopeless past and He says, "I will restore to you the years the locusts have eaten." Oh this blessed Friend, that gives back the things that we have lost. No life is too blighted, no past is too discouraging, no case is too hard for His grace and power.

"Nothing is too hard for Jesus;

No man can work like Him."

But all this is as nothing compared with what awaits us in the days of restitution which His coming again is to bring back; our moldering body, our departed friends, our lost paradise, and it shall be true

"Our more than Egypt's shame

Exchanged for Canaan's glory,

And our lost heaven won."

4. Above all else the year of Jubilee was a year of joy and the gospel of the Holy Ghost is a gospel of gladness. The Holy Spirit is the messenger and the source of peace and lasting joy. We do not need to go to heaven to know its joys. "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Now all this is not an old gospel merely, but a gospel ever new. The blessed Spirit is with us not only to whisper it to the troubled heart, but to make it real in our deepest life. Let us not attempt to preach that gospel without "the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." Salvation is not a creed; it is a life, and the world is yet to realize all that is meant by the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. Oh, that we might have in our hearts the joy that He brings to commend this gospel, and that we might so believe in Him that He will also work in the hearts of all who hear and make our gospel to be not in word only, but in power.

But there is one impressive fact in connection with this text that we must not pass by without a further reference. It was not without deep significance that the Lord Jesus paused and "closed the book" at the passage in the prophecy which He did. The book which He closed was the record of judgment, "the day of vengeance of our Lord." The time for that had not yet come. This is the day of grace, the day of mercy, the day of probation, but we read in the sacred volume of a day when the "books shall be opened." The Lord will take up the scroll again and turn to the place where He left off, and the heavens will echo with that last clause, "the day of vengeance of our God." The parenthesis of grace is almost over, the climax will come with His appearing. Dear reader, make haste to know Him as your Friend and Savior before you meet Him as your Judge. Make haste to take refuge in the gospel of the Jubilee before you shall be awakened by the trumpet of the judgment.

There is a story told of a lady who had a case at law that caused her much concern. She went to an attorney and asked him to take it up, and he was disposed to do so, although the case was a bad one, but he said, "If you will commit it to my hands, I can carry you through." Day after day she dallied and delayed, until at last the summons came to her that the case was coming on for hearing and she must at once decide upon her course of defense. She hastened to the attorney and said, "I am ready now to give you the case." His answer filled her with confusion and despair. "Madam," he said, "it is too late. I would have taken your case if you had come to me sooner, and I could have carried you through. I was willing to act as your attorney, but within the last few days I have been appointed to be your judge, and when the case comes up for hearing, I must sit upon it not as your friend, but as an impartial arbiter of your fate. You should have come to me before."

The illustration needs no application. This is the day of grace. Tomorrow will be the day of judgment. Oh, take the Savior as your Advocate before you have to meet Him as your Judge.

Chapter 17 – Preparing the Way of the Lord

“The voice of him that cries in the wilderness; prepare you the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Is. 40: 3.)

This chapter opens the third section of the prophecies of the book of Isaiah relating to the return, consisting chiefly of longer captives from the exile and the coming of the Messiah.

Many modern critics hold that it was written by a second Isaiah in the time of the captivity, and one hundred and fifty years after the earlier portion of the book. Conservative expositors still hold to the old view that the prophet anticipated the future and wrote in inspired vision of things to come as if they were taking place at the time.

The text is written from the standpoint of the exile. The captives are waiting in sorrow and bondage for the coming of the Lord to set them free. The one bright hope of their bondage is, “Behold, the Lord shall come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule before Him. He shall lead His flock like a shepherd.” But this coming of the Lord for Israel’s deliverance was but a type of all those other comings which were to follow at the great epochs of the ages. A few centuries later He was to come again in the flesh as the incarnate Son of God. The promise also may well include the coming of the Holy Spirit in times of special blessing to the church of God; a coming such as God’s people are waiting and praying for today in every land. The climax of all these comings will be the glorious return of our Lord and King “when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe.”

The prophet calls upon the people to prepare for the coming of their king, and this is also a summons to us bidding us to meet the conditions which will bring His presence in our midst and in our day.

There are five voices in this dramatic passage that speak in the wilderness, each with a distinct message.

The first is the voice of divine love and pardon, assuring the people of God’s forgiveness and grace.

The second is the voice of preparation that bids them get ready for His presence, for He is to come Himself to dwell among them.

The third is the voice of the Spirit as He breathes upon all fleshly and forbidden things, and leads them down into that deeper death which is to bring the spiritual realization of the promise.

The fourth is the voice of faith as it proclaims from the mountain tops the glad tidings to Jerusalem and Zion, “Behold, your King comes.” And the last is the voice of God Himself responding to their faith and declaring, “Behold, your God shall come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule before Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arms, carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” (Is. 40: 10, 11.)

I. The voice of pardon.

The Hebrew construction here is dramatic and beautiful. Softly breathing upon the air like the faint notes of rising music comes the whisper, "Comfort you My people, says the Lord; speak to the heart of Jerusalem." (Is. 40: 1.) It is like a love note wooing a maiden's heart. Then the notes rise to bolder tones and ring out like a trumpet call, "Cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished," or, as the margin reads, "that her appointed time has come; that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Is. 40: 2.)

The very first thing that is necessary in our preparing to meet the Lord is that we should accept His grace, dismiss our doubts and fears and be reconciled at our Father's feet. We can have no fellowship with God while guilt and fear interpose their heavy clouds between us and His love. God meets us with the frank and full proclamation of His grace and love and bids us accept His pardon without conditions and without reserve. The very first thing for the sinner to do is to receive God's mercy. You may not be able to understand how He can offer you such grace, but that is His business, not yours; it is yours to take it in thankful confidence and enter into the relations of a forgiven and accepted child. Then He can lead you on into all the fulness of his manifested presence and deeper blessing.

"She has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Is. 40: 2.) This is a strange and striking announcement. Does it mean that God's mercy is given on the principle that where sin abounded, grace should much more abound? Does He, in His marvelous generosity, treat us so much better than we deserve, that the most unworthy receive most richly of His grace?

Or does this double portion mean that the sufferings of Israel were a type of the sufferings of their great Messiah; that Israel, the servant of the Lord, was fulfilling in some measure now the vicarious work of the greater Servant of the Lord that was soon to come, and that their calamities as a nation had been a foreshadowing of that great atonement which was to be made for them by the Son of Man, and which was, as it were, discounted and anticipated now in the mercy of God and deemed a double satisfaction for all their sins? This, at least, we know: His great sacrifice is the ground of our forgiveness and salvation, and that it is for every believing soul,

"Of sin the double cure,

Cleansing from its guilt and power."

If we would prepare for the deeper blessing which the Lord is waiting to give, let us begin at the foot of the cross; let us take the riches of His grace in Jesus Christ and God's double for all our sins.

II. The voice of preparation.

"The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." (Is. 40: 3-5).

After God meets us in His pardon and love, there is a deeper experience into which He would bring us. He wants to come Himself and dwell within us. This is the climax of the believer's experience, the highest possibility of blessing here. But for this we must prepare the way. The promise also includes His coming in blessing to His church and people. There are special seasons of spiritual blessing promised to the church and the people of God. The Holy Ghost does come in a very glorious way and give power to His word and salvation to His people; but for this also there must be special preparation. The crooked must be made straight and the rough places plain. The stumbling-blocks must be removed and the way of the Lord prepared. To each conscience and heart the light will come directly and individually. If we want to know, God will show us what hinders the fulness of blessing, and He will make us both willing and able to put it aside and then He will come into our own hearts and through us into the hearts of others in the fulness of His power and blessing. Is He speaking this word to the conscience of any reader of these lines? Are there low places in our life that should be raised to a higher level of fellowship and obedience? Are there crooked places that need to be made straight? Are there rough places that need to be made smooth? Is there sin unconfessed and uncleansed? Is there strife or strain with any fellow Christian? Is there any forbidden thing in our relations with man or woman? Is there a neglect of the family altar, the Word of God, the house of God and the habit of secret prayer? Is there something which stands out before the searchlight of the Holy Ghost as we read these lines, and which we know is a stumbling-block and a hindrance in our life? God help us to meet it without reserve, and so to open the way that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed in our hearts and lives and divine things shall shine with a beauty and reality so heavenly that it will almost seem as if we had never known the Lord before. God is waiting to show His glory and to lift us to a plane where all that we have known of His grace and blessing shall seem but as the light of the moon to the sunshine of His face. Shall we prepare the way of the Lord?

III. The voice of the Spirit.

“The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withers, the flower fades because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God shall stand forever.” (Is. 40: 6-8.)

There is a still more searching, penetrating voice. It is the very breath of the Spirit, withering our fleshly life and bringing to death all that is of the old natural life, that we may rise to the supernatural and resurrection life with our risen Lord, and His Word may have free course through all our being. Life must always begin with death, both in the individual soul and the church work of the Master. God cannot purify or improve the flesh. It must be condemned and crucified, and God cannot use the worldly and unscriptural methods by which the church too often is seeking, through fleshly means, to bring people to its fold. All this must die, and through the simplicity and power of His Word and Spirit alone the work must be accomplished. Oh, how much rubbish in the form of religious machinery and manmade revivals must be got out of the way before the Holy Ghost can come in the fulness of His power, and how much of mere sentimentalism and worthless formalism must be burned out of our individual experience before we can go down to death with our Lord and come forth in the fulness of His resurrection life!

IV. The voice of faith.

The next voice rings out in trumpet notes of confidence from the mountain height. It is the voice of faith proclaiming that the blessing has begun and the Lord Himself is coming to His people. The Greek translation is, "Oh, you that bring good tidings unto Zion, get up into the high mountain; Oh, you that bring good tidings unto Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength, say unto the cities of Judah: Behold, your God." (Is. 40: 9.) The herald of faith must precede the coming of the Lord. We must believe before we can receive, whether for ourselves or for the work of the Master, and we must believe so utterly and unreservedly that we shall not fear to commit ourselves to our confidence and go forth to confess our blessing.

V. Finally, the voice of God Himself responds, "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him." (Is. 10: 10.)

He will come in power. He will come to bring things to pass. He will come to answer prayer. He will come to silence the adversary and deliver His people. He will come to convict the indifferent and unbelieving world of sin. He will come to break down hardened hearts. He will come to lead ungodly men to the feet of Jesus and save the worst of sinners, and separate His people from the world and sin and reenact once more the victories of Pentecost. He will come to do the things we cannot do. He will come to consecrate the wealth of His selfish people and enable them to go forth with the message of salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth. He will come to silence the voice of unbelief and answer the unbeliever and the agnostic, not with words, but with mighty demonstrations of His power and presence.

And He will come in providence as well as grace to judge among the nations and prepare the way for His more glorious coming as earth's millennial King. Already we see some signs of His mighty working as the Ancient of Days and the Judge of sinful nations, but we are to behold more wondrous things as the latter days hasten to their consummation.

But these things must come to pass first through the revelation of His power in the hearts of His people. It is true His body, the church, with the Head, is to work in the victories of His providence in the world; and so it is from a great awakening that there must come the prayer, the faith and the cooperation that are to bring the mightier victories of His hand in the world at large. "He is able to do exceedingly above all that we ask or think," but it is "according to the power that works in us" that His mighty working in the world is to be revealed. He works through His people, and according to their faith and spiritual preparation.

If, therefore, we would see the coming of our King in glory and the preparation of the world to meet Him, let us first receive Him in our own hearts, and work and pray for the opening of the hearts of His people everywhere for His incoming and indwelling, until the standard of Christian life shall rise to such a level that God can accomplish through His people all the highest possibilities of His promise and His grace.

The expression "His reward is with Him" literally means His recompense. This has reference, no doubt, to His judicial working in connection with the wicked and sinful nations of men. Already we see Him dealing with them in judgment and giving to us some pledges of that far-reaching and impartial retribution which He is yet to mete out to those that have oppressed His people and abused their sacred trust as the selfish and sinful rulers of this godless age. We are to expect more and more

the manifestations of His judgments as His people rise to that plane of holy fellowship which will enable them to stand with Him in the conflicts and victories of these last days.

But it is not all judgment. It is not all power. He is coming also in the gentleness of His grace. “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.” (Is. 40: 11.) His coming will bring His people into all that is meant by the “green pastures”

and the “still waters” of His grace. And His coming is to include the children, too. “He shall gather together the lambs in His arm and carry them in His bosom.” But what is meant by this last clause, “He shall gently lead those that are with young?” Perhaps it is the picture of the tenderness with which the shepherd will guard them in the helplessness of motherhood; not hurrying or driving them as the cruel conqueror when he carried them across the land in that fearful captivity which we find depicted on the Babylonian monuments showing the brutal soldiers driving helpless women and children before them, and tossing aside the weak and fainting ones to perish by the wayside. Not so will this gentle Shepherd lead His flock, but with tender care will He conduct them in the noontide heat and rest them by the still waters, and carry the feeble ones in His loving arms.

But the phrase has perhaps a different meaning. “Those that are with young”

would seem to suggest the mother and the young as they travel together. And when the mother is unwilling to follow the shepherd he sometimes carries the lamb across the river, and then she follows because her lamb has gone before. So sometimes He has led us by taking our loved ones from us and calling them on before, that we might follow them when we would not follow Him.

So He is waiting to come; to come to our hearts in personal blessing; to come to our work in the power of the Holy Ghost; and to come again in the fulness of His glory and make all things new. Do we long for His coming? Then let us arise and “prepare the way of the Lord.”

Chapter 18 – The Passion of God

I have long time held my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once (margin: I will gasp and pant together. R.V.). (Is. 42: 14.)

This impassioned text has been appropriately and not irreverently described as the passion of God. But it is not the only passage in this intense prophetic volume which expresses the majestic appearing of Jehovah as He arises for the vindication of His glory and the deliverance of His people. Again and again we find the prophet's soul enkindled to the most sublime enthusiasm as he describes the march of God's glorious purpose towards its end. The picture becomes a sort of heavenly drama in which the heart of God upon the throne and the Holy Spirit in the church below move in sympathy in the mighty conflict.

Our text is really associated with a number of similar texts which together afford a striking picture of the intense conflict in the heavenly places which is ever going forward with intenser force as the crisis of the age draws nigh.

I. The cry.

The first passage in this sublime drama is Isaiah 64: 1-4, "Oh, that You would rend the heavens, that You would come down, that the mountains might flow down at Your presence, as when the melting fire burns, the fire causes the waters to boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence. When You did terrible things which we looked not for, You came down, the mountains flowed down at Your presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, beside You, what He has prepared for him that wait for Him."

This is the cry of the waiting soul for God to reveal Himself in the majesty of His glory and His power. There are times when the hearts of men seem to have become so stupidly indifferent, when the church herself is so fast asleep, and when even earnest hearts seem to have settled down to such a dead level of self-content, that the praying souls who look out upon the religious conditions of our time are compelled to send up this passionate cry as they feel that nothing less than the very dynamite of God can clear the air and wake the dead.

It is like one of those days which sometimes come in summer when the atmosphere is so sultry and the air so dead that we breathe by gasps, and after a while we instinctively look out upon the horizon and long for the electric storm, the cleaving lightning and the crashing thunder to break the awful spell, to clear the air and restore our vital breath.

Such a condition is upon us today in the religious history of our time. The public conscience is so corrupted that vice has ceased to stir us. The horrors of war grow insipid through the hardening influence of habit. The moral and social standards of mankind and the tone of public opinion grow looser and lower. The chief interest of the study even of God's Holy Word is centered upon the

excitement of higher criticism. Intellectual doubt has pushed aside the simple faith of other days. The world has swept away the barriers of separation and the church is sleeping on the enchanted ground of selfcomplacency. Even those who know and love the Master best feel paralyzed by the presence of depressing conditions in the air, and Zion's watchmen are crying out in desperate earnestness, "Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down." (Is. 64: 1.)

This is not a figure of speech referring to God's historical manifestation at Mt. Sinai and in the wilderness or as He came in Isaiah's time to destroy the armies of Sennacherib and deliver Jerusalem, for as we read the passage through we find that verse four forms part of one of the most important quotations in one of Paul's epistles to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 2: 9, 10.) There he applies all this directly to the Holy Spirit, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, but God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit."

This mighty revelation of God for which the prophet cries is not a mere miraculous display of His glory and His power before the nations, but a spiritual coming of the Holy Ghost to the hearts of His people as they seek Him in earnestness and faith, for he adds (Is. 64: 5), "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness." God is waiting therefore to reveal to earnest souls the glory of His grace and power in a measure such as "eye has not seen nor ear heard," nor our highest spiritual conceptions have ever dreamed. Shall we meet His challenge? Shall we send up the cry until the heavens open and God comes down in the revelation of His presence and His power, and the mountains of opposition and iniquity melt away at His presence, and the melting fire of apostolic love kindles the heart of the church of God, and the waters boil in the engines of our spiritual machinery, and the power of God goes forth into every agency of Christian work and world-wide evangelization?

That is what the prayer may mean according as our faith will dare to claim it. God give us the prayer and the answer until the church of God shall wake from her debasing slumber and once more stand forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners."

II. The answer.

Our text proper is the answer to this cry. "I have long time held My peace; I have been still and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman. (Is. 42: 14.) The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: He shall cry, yes, roar; He shall prevail against His enemies." (Is. 42: 13).

Yes, God waits and suffers long. The cry of the needy seems unheeded, the triumph of the proud appears unchallenged, the prayer of the saint finds no answer, but God is not asleep or dead. Prayer is accumulating before the throne. God is waiting until the cup of sin is full and the moment strikes when all the forces of His omnipotence are let loose in a cyclone of glorious power and victorious majesty.

What a blending of splendid figures we have here! There is the shout of the warrior. There is the cry of the travailing woman. There is the convulsion of a great cyclone. There is the gasp and the panting of a mighty wrestle, and there is the final overthrow of every obstacle and opposition. What does all this mean?

1. It is a picture of the heart of God. Our heavenly Father is not a selfish embodiment of isolation and power like the Buddhist's dream of Nirvana, but a great, loving, living heart in constant touch with the needs of His people and the conditions of the world over which He reigns. He that made the heart of the soldier has in Him all the heroic qualities which have illuminated the battlefields of earth. He who made the tempest and the lightning has in Him all the force of which they are but heart throbs. He who gave the mother her passionate love has in Him all the depths of maternal tenderness for His suffering children. He who created the father's heart is the great Father Himself. Look at Him as He seeks for His lost Adam amid the shades of Eden crying, "Adam, where are you?" Listen to Him as He cries out over a sin-cursed world, "It repents Me that I have made man and I will destroy him from the face of the earth." (Gen. 6: 6, 7.) Listen again as He cries over the sufferings of Israel in the brick-fields of Egypt, "I have seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt and have heard their cry, for I know their sorrows." (Ex. 3: 7.) Hear Him as He wails over Ephraim, His prodigal child, "How shall I give you up, Ephraim; how shall I deliver you, Israel? My heart is turned within Me; My repentings are kindled together." (Hosea 11: 8.) Listen as He pleads through Jeremiah with His wandering bride, Israel. "I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals." (Jer. 2: 2.) Listen again as there falls from heaven the sweet cadence of His love. "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him, for He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust." (Ps. 103: 13, 14.) And yet once more a softer cadence falls and the words breathe out the tenderest depths of maternal love. "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." (Is. 66: 13.)

Yes, that is the great Heart whose pulse beats move the mighty universe and throb responsive to His children's need and His people's cry. He will not always be silent. He will respond.

"Oh, watchers on the mountain height,

Stand firm and steadfast there;

Oh, wrestlers in the vale beneath,

Cease not your sevenfold prayer;

God will not always wait; He will

Accept your sacrifice;

Oh, loving hearts and praying hands,

God will in love arise."

2. It means not only the heart of God, but the passion of Christ, His beloved Son. Isaiah has given us a picture of this passion. (Is. 58: 1-5). He beholds a mighty Conqueror marching from Edom, glorious in His apparel and yet with garments stained with blood; and as he listens the Conqueror proclaims His mighty name, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." But the prophet asks, "Why are You red in Your apparel, and Your garments like him that treads in the wine fat?" Once more comes the answer, "I have trodden the winepress alone. I looked and there was none to help; I wondered that

there was none to uphold. therefore My own arm brought salvation unto Me, and My fury, it upheld Me.”

This is a picture of the Son of God in the mighty conflict of redemption. The passion of His Father’s heart was passed on to Him, and with obedience and willing love He has hastened down to meet the awful emergency and lead the mightiest battle of the ages. The hate of Satan, the opposition of men, the power of earth and hell were all arrayed against Him and as He pressed through to the cross, He cried in the intensity of His agony, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.” (Luke 12: 50.) The curtain rises for a moment on that agony in Gethsemane and His sweat is as great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Once more He seems to sink in dying anguish on the cross, but again we hear the shout of victory, “It is finished,” and we see the rending gates of death as He comes forth a conqueror in His resurrection. He passes through the heavenly gates in His ascension glory, but even there the conflict does not end. Still He is regarded as the great High Priest and mediatorial King. Still He is leading the hosts of God as the Captain of our salvation, and still we hear the shout of the Conqueror, and we feel the falling tear of the Sufferer as “He is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” Bending from the throne, He whispers to persecuting Saul, “Why do you persecute Me?” Pleading at the closed heart of the sinner, He cries, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” (Rev. 3: 20.)

Yes, it is the passion of God still in the heart of Jesus, and the conflict must still go on until the last enemy is subdued and the last saint is gathered home.

3. The passion of the Holy Ghost. The Father passes on the burden to His beloved Son, and the Son in turn has transferred it to the Holy Ghost. It is His high vocation to finish the work which Jesus began upon earth. Unlike the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost has no body of His own, and therefore His conflict is carried on in the body of Christ, which is the church. It is our hearts that must feel His agony. It is our lips that must breathe His prayer. It is our hands that must be responsive to His touch. And in all this we are but representing our Living Head, the Lord Jesus in heaven as well as our Living Heart, the Holy Ghost on earth.

Now, the Spirit is constantly represented in the New Testament as a suffering, sympathizing Being. We can “grieve” Him, thus implying that His heart is sensitive to slight and to sorrow. The Apostle James tells us that “The Holy Spirit that dwells in us loves us to jealousy.” Therefore we can wound His jealous love by failing to meet His expectations and give to God our whole devotion. In a very remarkable passage in the eighth chapter of Romans, He is said to make “intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.”

These groanings represent the agony of prayer by which He works out in the hearts of His people the victories of grace.

In yet another passage (Eph. 6: 10-18) we find Him leading the great conflict in the heavenly places where the weapon is “the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God,” and the agency of victory is “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” So we find the Holy Ghost sharing the passion of God and all through the Christian age representing the suffering of heaven in the long agony of the redemption’s conflict.

4. The cooperation of the people of God. But it is through the hearts of His people that the Holy Ghost must work, and if we are not responsive to His touch, how can He work? If you had a paralyzed tongue and arms and limbs enfeebled by disease, your brain might think never so wisely, your will might purpose never so forcibly, but all would be futile if your tongue refused to speak a word, your feet to move to the message and your hands to fulfil the plan.

So the Holy Ghost is hindered by the unresponsiveness of His people and the agony is often caused chiefly by His struggle to awaken our slumbering souls to understand His thought and to enter into His prayer. As we look back through the history of earnest lives, we find that the servants of God were sufferers. Jeremiah was like a sensitive harp echoing every sorrow of his suffering people. "Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears," was his cry, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." Again he cries, "I said, I will not make mention of Him nor speak any more in His name; but His Word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay."

We find the great Isaiah crying out as he watches the burden of Dumah, "My loins are filled with pain; pains have taken hold of me as the pains of a woman that travails; my heart panted; fearfulness frightened me. Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning comes and also the night."

Habakkuk, the poet prophet, pleaded with God, "Oh Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years, in wrath remember mercy," and God answers his prayer by a hurricane of power. "His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of His praise; the mountains saw You and they trembled, the overflowing of the water passed by; the deep uttered his voice and lifted up his hands on high; You went forth for the salvation of Your people."

We find Deborah raised up in Israel as the counselor of Barak; and while he leads the battle in the front, she waits in her tent in a greater conflict of prayer. As she prays, the whole panorama passes before her until the enemy is scattered and the shout of triumph rises over the land and Deborah is in it all, and as the cyclone in her soul subsides in peace, she breathes out her glad relief in the cry, "O my soul, you have trodden down strength."

It was thus that Elijah prayed on Carmel when his body was bowed together in soul travail until an answer came.

It was thus that Paul described his spiritual sufferings for his flock. "I want you to know what great conflict I have for you," and then he explains it all in that profound passage (Col. 1: 24), "I rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, the church." And a little later (Col. 1: 29), "I also labor, striving according to His working, which works in me mightily."

Writing to the Galatians he says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth, until Christ be formed in you," and to the Philippians he says, "God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ," and it is with reference to them he writes, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear to be in me."

This is the very mystery of fellowship with Jesus. This is the deepest secret of power. This is the highest service that we can render to Christ and His church. Sometimes the prayer becomes a groan until we think our prayer is lost, but that is the very moment when it has overcome.

Sometimes God lays upon a praying one the burden of a worker, and while the one is active, the other is silent, and yet the silent force is the real power. Anna Shipton tells of having had upon her heart for some weeks a minister of Christ in a ceaseless agony of prayer. During that time, ignorant altogether of her prayer for him, he was led into the fulness of Christ and became the instrument in the salvation of scores of souls, and never knew until afterwards that the secret of it all was a silent, suffering life which was not even in outward contact with him.

This was the secret of that wonderful revival that has lately swept through the valleys of Wales. This was the secret of the power of David Brainard, Jonathan Edwards and William Burns. It is this that is to set the church on fire with consecration and holiness. It is this that is to awaken a zeal which will give to her languid work something of the energy of the great enterprise of modern commerce. It is this that is to bring the great evangelistic and missionary campaign which will give the gospel as a witness to the world and prepare the way of our coming Lord. And it is this which is to set in motion the mighty forces of providence among the nations which will “overturn and overturn and overturn until He shall come whose right it is.”

There was a man in ancient Babylon to whom God gave the name, “Oh, man of desires.” The secret of Daniel’s character was a great capacity for holy desire. He had insatiable longings for the kingdom of God, and he prayed them out for weeks together in an agony of love. What followed?

The mightiest conqueror on earth was sitting upon the throne of the empire. Cyrus, sated with conquests, had nothing more to ask of earthly success. Suddenly there came to him a strange purpose and he issued a decree telling the world that the Lord God of heaven had commanded him to build Him a house in Jerusalem and to send back the captive Jews. But behind that decree and that band of returning captives and that restored city and temple, see that “man of desires” silently praying in Babylon.

Or shall we look at a still grander vision? There is silence in heaven. The voice of God has hushed every angelic song, for the prayers of the saints are being brought in. They have been long accumulating, they have been treasured up in golden vials. God sends for them to be presented at His throne, and as He breathes in their sweetness, mingled with the incense of the great High Priest Himself, no sound is permitted to disturb the sacred hour. But this is not all. The command is next given to take these prayers and pour them out upon the earth again, and as they are emptied back upon the world from which they came, lo, there are voices and thunderings and a great earthquake, and the mighty angels of the coming advent begin to sound the trumpets that proclaim that the consummation of the age has come.

And come through prayer; come through the passion of holy desire in loving, longing Christian hearts. Oh, that we might understand our high calling! Oh, that we might enter into the Holiest by His precious blood! Oh, that we might know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings! Oh, that we might be saved from the curse of lukewarmness and “enkindled with the passion fire of love divine”!

Chapter 19 – The Servant of the Lord

“Behold My servant whom I uphold, My elect in whom My soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon Him. He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles; he shall not cry nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged until he has set judgment in the earth and the isles shall wait for his law.” (Is. 42: 1-4.)

This expression, “the servant of the Lord,” is a sort of keynote to a large portion of the prophecies of Isaiah. The phrase is used in three senses. First, it is applied to Israel, the servant of the Lord. We find it so used in Isaiah 41: 8, and other passages, “You, Israel, are My servant; Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, My friend.”

But Israel failed to fulfil his great trust as the servant of the Lord and was put aside and the Lord Jesus Christ now becomes the Servant of the Lord. So the expression is used in the present text. So again in Isaiah 49: 3, 52: 13, 53: 11, etc. Then the plural form is used and in several passages toward the end of the prophecy we find, “The servants of the Lord” spoken of. The reference here is to the people of God individually who, as members of Christ and fellow servants of the great Minister of the covenant follow in His steps of service. So we find it in Isaiah 54: 17, 65: 13, etc. It is to the second application of this term that our attention is now called.

I. The Great Servant.

God wanted some one to represent Him in the world. He had given to mankind a revelation of His will and it was necessary that some one should fulfil it. God’s law could not be left a broken and dishonored memorial of man’s disobedience like some splendid architectural plan which no one could be found to transform into an actual edifice. His honor and glory demanded that some one should fulfil it and render unto heaven a devotion and service which man had failed to give.

It was for this purpose that Israel had his high calling, and yet Israel utterly failed to keep his own law. At last one Man was found who could render unto heaven the obedience due to the authority of God. “Lo, I come,” was His cry,

“I delight to do Your will, oh God, yes Your law is in My Heart.” (Ps. 40: 8.) At every step of His earthly life the supreme business of Jesus was to do His Father’s will, and He was able to say, “I do always those things that please Him.” (John 8: 29.) The one supreme purpose of His life was to glorify the Father and finish the work He had given Him to do, and at last He could say, as He handed over His accomplished task, “I have glorified You on the earth; I have finished the work You gave Me to do.” (John 17: 4.)

Among the types of Moses, there was a beautiful ceremony by which a Hebrew slave, when his term of service had expired and he had the option to go free, was permitted, if he preferred, to resume the yoke of bondage and continue a slave by his own choice. Perhaps his wife and children were slaves and he did not want to leave them in bondage. Perhaps he loved his master better than his liberty, and

did not want to go free, and so he was permitted to say, "I love my master, I love my wife and children, I will not go out free." And then this ceremony was performed. His ear was pierced and he was nailed to the doorpost of his master's house by his ear in token of voluntary subjection and servitude.

This beautiful type has been applied to Christ in one of the prophetic Psalms where the Messiah is represented as saying, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears have You bored; then said I: Lo, I come, I delight to do Your will, oh My God, yes, Your law is within my heart." (Ps. 40: 6-8.)

This is a picture of Christ as the great Servant. He might have retained His liberty and remained in heaven, but He loved His Father, He loved His Bride, the Church, He loved His lost children here, and He gave up His liberty and as the apostle expresses it in Galatians, "For when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law." (Gal. 4: 4.) He fulfilled our tasks, He paid our debts. He offered to God the righteousness which we had failed to give and of His finished work the Father could say, "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sakes; He will magnify the law and make it honorable." (Is. 42: 21.)

But there was another purpose which Israel failed to serve as the Lord's servant, and that was to be God's messenger to the world, the light of the Gentiles and the revealer of God's holiness and grace to the children of men. Instead of this Israel sank, through their sins, to a condition that the prophets describe as even worse than the heathen. God had to humble them before their enemies and send them into shameful captivity under the Gentile nations. This glorious ministry has been committed unto the divine Servant and so we read in this passage, "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness and will hold Your hand and will keep You, and give You for a covenant of the people, for the light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord, that is My name, and My glory I will not give to another, neither My praise to graven images." (Is. 42: 6-8.)

In these respects, we are called likewise to be servants of the Lord; to represent Him by our lives and by our testimony as the messengers of His Word to all mankind. The apostles loved to call themselves the servants of the Lord. Christ taught His disciples that the highest honor was in the lowliest service. "He that will be great among you, let him be your minister, and he that will be chief, let him be your slave."

Oh, that we might be able to say, as our High Priest, "Whose I am and Whom I serve."

II. The Servant's acceptance.

"Behold My servant in whom My soul delights." (Is. 42: 1.) God's heart had been disappointed in the race. There had come up to Him from this sinful world the stench of human vileness, and age after age He had sought for someone that could bring the sacrifices of a sweet smelling savor. At last on Jordan's banks there stood a man to whom He could say, "Behold My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3: 17.) God's face shone with a light so bright that it broke through the opening heavens, and for a moment shed its glory upon the earth beneath.

It is because of that acceptance that we are justified and accepted now. “He has made us accepted in the beloved,” is the measure of our standing as justified believers in the sight of God. Literally, the verse means “accepted in the Son of His love,” and it conveys the force that we are accepted just as He and loved the same as He. Not only so, our sanctification comes through Him. In His sublime prayer in John 17, He thus prays concerning the Father’s love “that the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them and I in them.”

He asks His Father to love us just as He loves the Son. The reason: He is so in us Himself that our personality disappears from view and it is only the Christ in us that the Father sees and loves. So we can pass out of our own self-consciousness and into this blessed Christ consciousness, and although feeling utterly unworthy in our own name we can ever by the righteousness of Jesus Christ our perfect sacrifice, know that this is true:

“So dear, so very dear to God,

More dear I cannot be;

The love wherewith He loves His Son.

That love He has for me.”

III. The Servant’s anointing.

“I have put My Spirit upon him.” (Is. 42: 1.) The Father endued Him for His work by the anointing of the Holy Ghost. That Spirit He shares with us and in Him we claim the same anointing for the same service. We are not asked to render unto Him our services at our own charges, but it is said of our ministry that we are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works which were before prepared that we should walk in them.” The gifts of power, wisdom, faith and supernatural efficiency prescribed for the church in the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians are all called “charismata,” that is, abilities bestowed upon us, not talents original with us.

Even love itself, the greatest of all the graces, is a gift and not a virtue. It is Christ’s love shed abroad in our hearts and flowing out to others from Him.

Beloved, are we anointed for service? Are we faithful servants and are we walking in the light of the blessed “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.”

IV. The Servant’s meekness.

“He shall not cry nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets.” (Is. 42: 2.)

The first element in the training of a good servant is discipline, subjection, self-suppression and self-restraint. How beautifully we behold this in the meek and lowly Christ! “I am among men as He that serves. “In this age of loud and noisy people, when even Christian work is blazoned, advertised and flaunted before the eyes of the multitude, how restful to turn to this picture of Him who is our great Example of service. The Hebrew word here literally means loud and screamy. He was not loud and

screamy, but His Spirit was very chastened and self-suppressed. We get a little conception of how the Deity within Him was pressing out for expression in that scene in the temple when He was twelve years old and when His heart gave utterance to that deep cry,

“Do you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2: 49.) And yet He went back for eighteen years to the quiet drudgery of the workbench at Nazareth and held within that bursting heart, that longing to glorify His Father and save and help His fellow men. At length the devil came to Him, to His highest longings, and whispered, “Now is your chance to reveal yourself and glorify your Father by a stupendous miracle. Cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple, throw yourself upon the protecting arms of omnipotence, let the people see who you are.” But He only said, “Get behind Me, Satan; you shall not tempt the Lord, your God.” Yet again the adversary tried to tempt Him to accept a throne among the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory, urging no doubt, not his selfish ambition and personal glory so much as the opportunity it would give Him to be a blessing to the world and alleviate the miseries of mankind. But again He refused the tempting offer and went forth on His path of lowly suffering.

During His earthly ministry how often we find Him giving up His rights. Just before Matthew quotes this passage from our text, he tells, (Matt. 12: 14),

“They held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew Himself from there and great multitudes followed Him and He healed them all and charged them that they should not make Him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias, the prophet, saying, “Behold My servant, whom I have chosen; My beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased: I will put My Spirit upon Him and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles; He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets.” (Is. 42: 1, 2.)

A little later, they tried to take Him by force and make Him a king, but He gently took Himself out of their hands. The Samaritans refused to receive Him and the ardent disciples insisted that He should call down fire from heaven and consume them, but He quietly answered, “You know not what manner of Spirit you are of,” and He went to another village. To the very close of His earthly ministry, we see the spirit of self-restraint. In the judgment hall, He answered not a word. Even after His resurrection, His appearances to the disciples were of the most simple and quiet character, and all the glory which He had won by His great redemption He kept in reserve, giving to His followers rather than assuming to Himself the victories of Pentecost and waiting for the reward of His sufferings until the end of the age while He still ministers in sympathy and tenderness to His suffering church, and is content to be the rejected Nazarene and let the present age have its day while He is slowly gathering in from the lowly children of sin the members of His body and His Bride.

Oh, that our service were more like His, more hidden “in the shadow of His hand” with less of self and more of Christ, and with that “hiding of His power” which is the very triumph of power divine.

The power which today controls the tremendous machinery of our age was hidden deep in the bowels of the earth thousands of years ago by the fire that consumed primeval forests and stored the coal mines of our mountains with the real material of all physical force. The mighty battleship, the swift Atlantic flyer, the trains that sweep across the myriad tracks of transportation are all moved by the coal mines of the mountains.

So the force which God uses in the great processes of the spiritual world comes forth from the hidden depths of lives where perhaps long ago the natural and the earthly were burned away by the fire of the Holy Ghost and God was starting up the power which today is leading some great revival or evangelizing some heathen land.

So Jesus waited at Nazareth and gathered the forces which made the last three and one-half years of His life accomplish more for the world than all the centuries before or since.

God help us to learn the silent sources of spiritual power and the ministry of waiting as well as working.

V. The Servant's gentleness.

"The bruised reed shall he not break and the smoking flax shall he not quench." (Is. 42: 3.) We need not seek far in the story of His life to find the illustrations of this blessed portrait.

Look at that crushed life which kneels weeping at His feet condemned by the Pharisee, condemned by her own sense of right, a bruised reed. What is there left for a woman who has thus lost all? But listen to Him: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (John 8: 11.) Look again at the disciple that has denied and blasphemed Him. Alas, Peter, it does seem to be all over with you this time. The Master is going now to come back no more. Many a time have you blundered and He has been there to take you up, forgive you and start you out again, but that is all over. Look, they are taking Him away, bound and fettered and in a little while He will be crucified and dead. It is too late, Peter. But lo, just at the last moment that loving, yearning face of Christ turns back and looks on Peter and that look was a volume. It said, "No, Peter, it is not all over. I forgive you and I trust you still." "And Peter wondered and wept bitterly." But for that look it would have been the story of Judas duplicated, but He would not break the bruised reed, and from that hour Peter was bound to his Master with a love that could never die, and his restored life was given to comfort tempted ones.

There is no life so crushed, there is no heart so discouraged but He has still some look of love, some word of cheer, some touch of victorious help.

The smoking flax refers rather to the feeble beginnings which others might think scarcely worth the trouble of treasuring, but He will take the feeblest beginning and fan the flame to a glorious fire. Look at that cowardly inquirer who comes sneaking in at the back door of the Master's lodging tonight. He is a member of the Jewish council. His name is Nicodemus and were it known that he was here it would be as much as his reputation is worth. Why does not the Lord disdain to meet him in this clandestine way? Why does He not say, "Nicodemus, I will have no followers that do not come out in the open and confess Me without reserve." Ah, no! Jesus is glad to see him. It is only a little smoke, but some day this man will stand up in that great council and defend the Master before His enemies. And so the Lord meets him and tells him the story of the new birth and the wondrous love of the Father in giving His only Son, and that man goes out tonight with a new life that can never die.

And Thomas, the doubting disciple, with scarcely faith enough to come to the meeting with his brethren; Thomas, the agnostic, demanding ocular demonstration and making his own terms of faith. All right, Thomas, you can come too. If you want to put your hand in the wound of the spear, you are

welcome. It is the nearest way to My heart. The Lord meets him on his own terms, but Thomas falls at His feet astonished, overwhelmed, ashamed, a thousand times convinced, crying, “My Lord and my God.”

Are there any reading these lines who feel that they have but a weak will, a timid faith and a worthless life to bring to Christ? Bring what you have. Better come blundering to His feet than not at all. He will not quench the smoking flax; He will not break the bruised reed.

VI. The Servant's strength.

But His gentleness is not weakness. Oh no! “He shall not fail nor be discouraged until he send forth judgment unto victory.” (Is. 42: 4.) The words translated “fail” and “discouraged” are the same as translated just before “break” and “quench.” While He will not despise the weak, He is not weak. What a mighty evidence the prophet gives us of His glorious and victorious strength. There is nothing in ancient prophecy more sublime than this prophetic vision of what some has called the passion of God as it rises to its climax and as He comes forth to the world in His last manifestation to beat down His adversaries and bring in His kingdom. “The Lord shall go forth as a mighty Man; He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war; He shall cry, yes, roar; He shall prevail against His enemies.” And then, like a great spasm of inward conflict, He continues, “I have long time held My peace, I have been still and refrained Myself; now will I cry like a travailing woman, I will destroy and devour at once; I will make waste mountains and islands and dry up all their herbs, and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools, and I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths they have not known; I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight; these things will I do unto them and not forsake them.” Space will not permit us to dwell on this sublime picture of the conflict of Christ and the passionate intensity with which we should be ready to enter into that conflict in the victories of faith and prayer. We are reading today of men of God who stand in front of a great religious movement whose very souls seem rent asunder in agonies of prayer as they plead for perishing souls, and we have also been told how the Holy Ghost has come in tidal waves of victory and blessing just through such spiritual conflicts and agonizing prayers. It is Gethsemane repeated in the body of Christ as once it was experienced by the Head. It is through His people the Master is to fight these final battles and win these millennial triumphs.

Oh, that we might enter into His throbbing heart, oh, that we might share the anguish of His love and the joy of His triumph, oh that each of us might say “Lord, kindle in this heart of mine

The passion fire of love divine.”

Chapter 20 – The Servant of the Lord

“You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” (Is. 49: 3.)

We have already seen that the expression, “servant of the Lord,” is used in three senses in the book of Isaiah. The first has reference to Israel, the second to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the third to the individual believer. Israel, having failed to meet the conditions of His high commission, Christ took His place as the Father’s Servant, and has transferred to us, the members of His body, the fellowship of service. It is in this latter sense that we are to consider the expression at this time. We find very much in this prophetic book about service.

I. The names given to the Lord’s servants.

1. Servant. This is the first term applied to us. It is used throughout the Scriptures in the strong sense, not merely of an employee, but of a bond slave. The Bible servant is the property of his master. The very principle of Christian service is that we first belong to Him ourselves and then we give Him our service just as in a royal palace every vessel bears the monogram of the king. He will not use any vessel that is not exclusively his own. So the Lord wants us to bear His monogram before He employs us on His commissions. The watchword of the true servant of the Lord is, “Whose I am and Whom I serve.” This is the source of constant weakness and failure in Christian work: the attempt to do things for the cause of Christ by people who do not themselves belong to Christ. This is all untempered mortar and worthless work. “Whose pocketbook is that?” was asked of a Christian gentleman. “Why, mine of course.” “To whom do you belong?” “I belong to the Lord.” “Ah, you belong to the Lord and the pocketbook belongs to you.” That is about the measure of average Christian service.

Paul gloried in calling himself the bond slave of Jesus Christ. Oh, that we might better learn his message to the Corinthians: “You are not your own; you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body which is God’s.” (1 Cor. 6: 19, 20.)

Beloved, are you a true servant of God? Have you ceased to own yourself?

Are you His property and do you recognize yourself and all you own as absolutely at His disposal, and are you letting Him shape your plans, direct your will and control your life? This is to be a servant of the Lord. “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service.”

2. Priests and ministers of God (Is. 61: 6.) The word “minister” also means a servant, but not in the extreme sense of the slave. It represents rather an official servant, one who holds an office in the public service. In this passage the two expressions “priests and ministers,” undoubtedly refer to the two official classes among the ancient Hebrews, namely, the priests and Levites. These together comprised the official servants of Jehovah, but they were quite different in their functions. The priests represented the idea of worship, the Levites, work. The first ministered directly to God; the second, to their brethren. The business of the priests was to offer sacrifice and incense in the holy place. The business of the Levites was to set up the tabernacle, to take it down, to carry it on its wilderness

journeys, to teach the people to perform the manual duties connected with the camp and the service of the sanctuary.

In the Christian Church there are not any longer two classes of servants, but the two kinds of service are combined in the life of each of us. We are to be both priests and Levites. One part of our ministry is to worship God, to love Him, to pray to Him, to praise Him, to pour forth continually the sacrifice of a loving, reverent heart in praise, communion and prayer as an “odor of a sweet smelling savor.” The other part is to be active, useful, helpful, practical, to serve one another by love, to work for the cause of Christ, to build up His Church, to seek and save the lost, to supply the means by which His work is carried on, to be teachers of His people and the active promoters of His work in every proper way. We are to blend the fervor of Mary with the hands of Martha. We are to be at once busy and devout, faithful in every earthly trust, yet “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

Beloved, are we thus ministering in His Church, a holy priesthood, true ministers of the sanctuary which God has built and not man?

3. Witnesses. (Is. 43: 10.) “You are My witnesses says the Lord.” A witness is one who bears personal testimony of what he knows. We are to know God so that we can make Him real to men. We are to know Christ and be able to communicate Him to others. This we are to do not only by what we say, but our whole life should be an object-lesson of witness-bearing for God. Is it truly so? Do we constantly reflect Him? Do we make Him real to the people who know us and see us from day to day? Do we make Him attractive to them so that they are hungry for the Christ that we have found? Do we always act as though we were on the witness stand for Him? Do we bring credit and honor to His name? Or are we sometimes like the man who had forgotten his sacred trust and although a prominent member of the Church of Christ, had allowed himself to be drawn into compromising friendships, fellowships and amusements, and was often found in the company of the ungodly, countenancing things which God could not approve. One of his truest friends had long tried to draw him away from this false life, but failed to impress him. One day he sent a card in to him as he sat at a worldly entertainment with a lot of godless companions, and on the other side of the card were these simple words, “You are my witnesses, says the Lord.” As he read it, he flushed crimson. He looked at the friends around him. He realized how out of keeping the whole surroundings were with his high calling as a witness for God, and he soon excused himself on the plea of an emergency call and left the forbidden world in which he had been betraying his Master, never to return again.

Beloved friend, are you a witness for Christ or against Him?

II. The qualifications of the servants of the Lord.

1. The fire-touched lips (Is. 6: 7.) It was thus that Isaiah’s own service for God had begun. It is thus that all true Christian service must begin, in the baptism of the Holy Ghost and the cleansing of heart and tongue by God’s consuming fire. Then his ears were opened to hear the voices of heaven. Then his eyes were opened to see the needs of the world. Then the message was understood, “Whom shall I send, and who will go?” and the answer came springing from his lips, “Here I am, send me.”

Beloved, it is not your natural abilities that can equip you for the service of the Lord. You must receive the definite baptism of the Holy Ghost. Have you received Him? If you have, the first place

where it will be evident will be your tongue. It will show its reality and power by what you say, and still more by what you do not say. Oh, has it burned up the frivolousness, the flippancy, the folly of unholy speech, and burned in God's messages to your trembling lips as in the days of old?

2. Opened ears. (Is. 50: 4). "The Lord has given me the tongue of one that has learned, that I may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. He awakens my ear morning by morning that I may hear as one that has been instructed." We must first hear our own messages from His lips before others can hear them from ours with any profit. The true servant of the Lord has a quickened ear. He knows the voice of his Master. "He hears the word at His mouth." His messages are not merely reasoned out and gathered up from the newspapers and the current religious literature of the time, but they are echoes of a heavenly voice, and back of them the speaker and the hearer recognize, "This says the Lord."

Fellow workers, do you know His voice? Do you wait for His messages and do you speak as one that has been instructed a "word in season to him that is weary"? It is not a great many words that help. It is not a whole sermon or talk. It is one single word that falls into one heart and another message into another. This is God's way of warning, quickening, convicting, comforting and inspiring His people.

Those who can thus hear God's voice and bring His message are the true prophets of every age. God give to us the prophetic spirit and the Godtouched ears and tongues of Pentecost.

3. Eyes blinded to all else but His work. (Is. 42: 19.) "Who is blind but My servant? or deaf, as My messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect and blind as the Lord's servant?"

God's true servants have to be blind to everything else but their business for Him. Like a driving horse, whose eyes are shaded from all side views and can only look straight on, so God would have us go with eyes concentrated on His work and will. How many things there are by which the adversary would sidetrack us or distract us. The world's attractions, the people about us, the things they say about us or do not say about us: all these we must be blind to and our watchword be, "This one thing I do."

4. Swift and willing feet to run His errands. (Is. 52: 7.) "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings." The Lord's servant must not only know, but he must go. His work will call him to the mountains, the hard place of service, but his feet will be "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace," and he will leave behind him a shining track of beauty and of light.

There is another fine passage about consecrated feet in Isaiah 32: 20.

"Blessed are you that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass." Sowing beside all waters has reference to the irrigated valleys of the Orient and the planting of our seed where the waters have prepared the soil. We are to follow the Holy Ghost as He opens our way and prepares the hearts of men. "The feet of the ox and the ass" are very suggestive of true Christian service. The ox is the toiling beast, the ass, the burden-bearer. The one works, the other suffers. Both suggest the fine symbol used by the Baptist Missionary Society as its trademark: an ox standing between a plough on the one hand and an altar on the other with the inscription over him, "Ready for

either or both.” The true servant of the Lord is ready for service or suffering as the Lord may call for the plough or the altar. This is finely worked out in the Gospel of Mark, which is a picture of Jesus Christ as the Father’s servant. There we see Him as the toiling Christ first and then as the suffering Christ.

Beloved, are our feet following His footprints, going forth beside all waters in ministries of loving service and patient suffering.

5. One more qualification for the true servant is found in our context. “He has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand has He hid me and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver has He hid me.” It is to be hidden in the shadow of His hand, while His hand alone is seen, and we are out of sight. The bane of much service is the blaze of publicity, the blowing of the trumpet of the worker and the bid that is so often made for popular sensation, applause and admiration. God only can use His hidden workers. The seraphim used four of their six wings to cover their faces and their feet and the true servant of the Lord will always seek to be out of sight himself that Jesus may be glorified.

Beloved, are we thus divinely equipped and consecrated for the service of our Lord?

III. The ministries of true service.

1. To give the light of the gospel to the world. In Isaiah 42: 6-7, we have the commission of the Master which has been passed on to His servants. “I will give You for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles to open the blind eyes and to bring out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.” This is our supreme service; to give the light of His gospel to the world and set free the prisoners of sin and Satan. Are we doing this? Is the chief business of our lives to spread the Gospel and save our fellow men?

2. “To speak a word in season to him that is weary.” (Is. 50: 4.) This is for the comfort and edification of His people. It is just as important that we minister to Christians as that we save sinners. God’s people need much comfort, quickening and spiritual help. They are often weary. Hearts are fainting all around us and we do not at all seem to care. Oh, for the men and women, that are ready to speak a word in season! If you are much with your Master, your lives will drop the oil of joy for mourning, and your hands will bring balm for broken hearts. The social call, the chance meeting on the street, the journey on the railway train, the call of some burdened business man for counsel and advice: all these will give you opportunities quite as valuable as the inquiry room, the Sunday school class and the religious meeting to speak such words for Christ and the comfort of your fellows. God help us, beloved, to be true to this wayside ministry.

3. We are called to work for the age to come. There is a very sublime passage in Isaiah 51: 16 which appeals to the highest feelings of the earnest Christian.

“I have put My words in your mouth and I have covered you in the shadow of My hand that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth and say unto Zion, you are My people.” What a superb figure! “Plant the heavens.”

“Lay the foundations of the earth.” The trees of righteousness and the amaranthine flowers that are filling the paradise of God are planted by our hands. Oh, some day to find in your home above innumerable souls that have been brought there through your instrumentality to be your joy and crown of righteousness forever. Thus we may “plant the heavens” and we may “lay the foundations of the earth.” That is the future millennial earth. The work we are doing in calling out a people for His name, in evangelizing the world and in preparing for His coming. Truly this is laying the foundations of that new earth where Christ shall reign and we shall sit with Him upon His throne.

Beloved, is there any earthly ambition that can compare with this? Is there any sort of hope that shines with so bright a luster? Is every recompense that earth can offer you worthy of comparison? Oh, turn from the tinsel baubles of a vain and passing world and begin to lay up treasure beyond. Come into that splendid partnership with Him where we receive our wages now, but our dividends by and by and the dividend shall be the whole inheritance. “He that reaps receives wages and gathers fruit unto life eternal.” Shall we “plant the heavens” and “lay the foundations of the earth,” and invest our lives in the age to come?

4. We are called to restore the things that have been lost by a faithless church. Here is a fine description of the ministry to which God is calling many today. Isaiah 58: 12: “They that shall be of you shall build the old waste places: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations and you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.” How much has been lost since Pentecostal days! How much has been missed from the full heritage of His will! Thank God, His faithful servants today are being used to repair the breaches; to restore the old paths and show us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

5. The supreme business of the servant is to glorify His Master. “Oh, Israel, you are My servant in whom I will be glorified.” (Isa. 49: 3.) Are we glorifying Him? Is it our supreme aim to do so? At a railway station an officer of the company was very strictly carrying out the instructions of his chief and excluding many from the gates. All sorts of devices were used by the knowing ones to get through but he was inexorably firm both to flatteries and frowns. At last one man said to him, “You seem to be absolutely indifferent to what anybody thinks of you in this crowd.” “Well,” said he, “my one business and my only ambition is to please the man that employs me, and he is the only man I am trying to please.” Oh, that loyalty to Christ might be as true! Are we glorifying Him?

IV. Promises to the servants of the Lord.

1. Upholding. (Is. 42: 6.) “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness and will hold your hand and will keep you.” The servant of the Lord is held and upheld by Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand.

2. All necessary resources. (Is. 45: 2, 3). “I will go before you and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron. and I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places.” His mighty providence will go before us and prepare our way. His infinite riches will open to us the treasures of darkness and He will supply the means and resources we require as we go forward and trust Him for His work.

3. Protection. (Is. 54: 17.) “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that

shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is of Me, says the Lord.” It is not because of our righteousness that He does this, but because He gives us His righteousness and guards us for His own name’s sake that our reputation is safe in His keeping and our lives are immortal until our work is done.

4. Efficiency and success. (Is. 55: 11.) “My word shall not return unto Me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” The fruit may tarry long, the work may seem in vain, but nothing that His Spirit has prompted can ever fall to the ground.

5. Compensation for seeming failure. (Is. 49: 2-6.) “Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. It is a light thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles that you may be My salvation unto the end of the earth.” Our work may seem to fail as the great Servant’s did in one direction, but we shall still be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and as He promised Christ, so to us He will also give a new and larger ministry in some other direction and make glorious compensation for every hard place and seeming failure.

6. The recompense of joy. (Is. 65: 13,14.) Here are some of the recompenses of the sorrowing and toiling servant. “Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty, behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed; behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart and shall howl for vexation of spirit.” Such is the joy of true service. Such is the recompense the Master holds for all that follow Him. He is a good Master. Let us be true and faithful servants. He was the great Servant Himself. Let us follow in His footsteps and count it our highest honor to say, “I serve.” Shall He have our lives? Shall He have them wholly, gladly and forevermore?

“Give me a faithful heart,

Likeness to Thee,

That each departing day

Henceforth may see

Some work of love begun,

Some deed of kindness done.

Some wanderer sought and won

Something for Thee.”

Chapter 21 – The Suffering Savior

“As many were astonished at You; his visage was so marred, more than the sons of men; so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at Him: for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

“He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.” (Is. 52: 14-15; 53: 11.)

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah should begin with our first text, including the last paragraph of the fifty-second chapter. It is all one combined picture of the suffering Messiah.

Jewish writers have tried hard to apply it to Israel as a nation and to show that it demands no other fulfillment in the life of an individual sufferer, but after the utmost strain of the natural force of language, such a construction utterly fails to carry conviction to an unprejudiced reader, and we are constrained to recognize this marred face of suffering, this Man of sorrows, this victim of sacrifice, this Conqueror of Satan and sin as no less a person than the Man of Galilee and the Man of Calvary who in the fulness of time appeared on earth and fulfilled every one of these minute predictions in His own person and in His passion and death.

The prophet commences the fifty-third chapter with a wail of complaint against the indifference and unbelief that rejected his momentous message and refused to recognize the arm of the Lord. He gives a picture of the sufferings of the Saviour and the fruits that grow from the blood-stained soil of Calvary.

I. The Sufferer.

Many details make up this tragic picture.

1. The first is His lowly birth. “He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” (Is. 53: 2.) This great sufferer began His career amid circumstances of the deepest humiliation. He was born of a maiden mother with a cloud of reproach upon His name. His lot was that of poverty. His cradle was a manger. His home was Nazareth, whose very name stood for all that was despicable and was a play upon the words of the text, for “Natsar,” just means a dry sprout, “a root out of a dry ground.” There seems to have been no natural attractiveness about the person of Jesus Christ in a purely human way. He was a contradiction of the ideals of the flesh, and a disappointment to every form of human pride.

2. His rejection by His own people. “He is despised and rejected of men; we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not.” (Is. 53: 3.)

What a bitter trial it was to Moses to come to his nation with high enthusiasm and patriotic devotion, prepared to stand up for them against their oppressors and then to find that they refused to appreciate

His services and failed to understand His mission. "Jesus came unto His own and His own received Him not." It must have been one of the great sorrows of His life to be conscious of the intense love which was sacrificing itself for His people and their utter inability to understand Him, appreciate Him or let Him save them.

3. The privations and sorrows of His earthly life. All the elements which constitute man's cup of sorrow filled His bitter draught of earthly pain. He was poor and had to toil for His own livelihood and that of His mother. He was lonely and felt Himself a stranger in a strange world. His life was one of constant self-denial, repression and intense toil, walking on foot again and again over all the land and working incessantly and often with wearied frame from dawn until darkness, teaching, healing, helping His fellow-men. And suffering was so strange to Him. He had never known sorrow before. It was a new world of experience. He was like a land bird far at sea and out of its element. He was like a naked man fighting his way through thickets of thorns. His whole being was open to a thousand sensitive sufferings that our coarser natures know nothing of, and He was indeed "acquainted with grief." Others left Him, His disciples forsook Him, but sorrow never left His side.

4. Perhaps the keenest element in His sorrow was His sacrificial sufferings.

"He was made sin for us who knew no sin." "You shall make His soul an offering for sin." (Is. 53: 10.) "He bare the sins of many." (Is. 53: 12). The terrible sting of sin entered His soul. We know something of what it is to be crushed with a single sin and perhaps agonize and pray for hours, before we rise above it and find forgiveness and victory; but on Him there rested all the sins of all the world. They were imputed to Him and counted as His own, and He had to bear their penalty and their poison.

A great writer has said that there are three things in the story of Jesus that are utterly above all human experience. The first is that an innocent Man suffered as no one else suffered before. The second is that an Almighty One was crushed, defeated, destroyed by forces that He could easily have overcome, and the third is that through this very paradox He has won His victory and accomplished His great purpose of the world's redemption.

The question is often asked, "Is it right for an innocent person to suffer for the guilt of sinners?" In answer we may say first that God has so permitted and therefore, it must be right. Secondly, vicarious suffering is the law of the universe. The vegetable world lives by absorbing the mineral. The animal world lives by absorbing the vegetable. The lower animals sacrifice themselves that the higher may live, and even the human race suffers and dies that it may give place to and propagate the next generation. Thirdly, He was voluntary in thus suffering vicariously for others. It would be wrong to compel an innocent person to suffer for the wrong of others, but if he chooses to be a substitute on the higher plane of heroism we have no right to prevent it. Fourthly, the One who suffered for us was not a stranger, but really One of our own race, its federal Head and entitled to represent us. And finally, it was on this principle that the human race fell through the sin of one man, Adam, our federal head. It is therefore in keeping that the race should be redeemed by their new head, Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt that Isaiah's picture of the Savior's sufferings represents them as vicarious. "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have

turned every one to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

(Is. 53: 6.) What a picture of concentrated suffering. It is as though one man were suddenly compelled to stand for all the debts of all the people in the world and from every quarter they came in upon him until he was swamped, bankrupt and crushed. It is as though a shepherd had gone out alone to stand between the flock and the wolves, and they all set upon him until they had torn him to pieces and he fell bleeding and dying, but the sheep were saved. It is as though all the burning rays of yonder sun at its torrid noon were converged in a great burning glass into one single point of flame and one sensitive heart was placed beneath that fiery focus and burned to cinders. All our guilt and all the penalty it deserved met upon Him and He sank beneath the awful load, but not until He had met the claim, had canceled the debt and had saved the world.

5. His trial and judgment. “He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who shall declare His generation, for He was cut off out of the land of the living.” (Is. 53: 8.) What a pathetic story the trial of Jesus was. Worn with a sleepless night, His clothing damp with the bloody sweat of the garden, His heart sore with the betrayal of Judas, He is hurried before the council of the Jews and there He has to face the cruel denial of Peter, His own disciple, and the false accusations of His bitter foes. Again He is hustled to the court of Pilate, dismissed to the judgment seat of Herod, marched back again amid the mockeries of the soldiers to Pilate’s court once more, and there insulted, belied, stripped and scourged with cruel lashes loaded with nails, until the flesh hangs bleeding from His bones, and even Pilate, moved with a strange sympathy, points to Him as a spectacle of compassion and cries, “Behold the man!” Then amid a hideous carnival of cruelty and scorn, He is condemned and compelled to carry His heavy cross to the hill of Calvary where they crucify Him. Well might He say in the prophetic words of Jeremiah, “Behold, and see all you that pass by if there be any sorrow like unto My Sorrow.”

6. His death and burial. “He poured out His soul unto death. He made His grave with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death.” (Is. 53: 12, 9.)

Death to Him must have had a touch more terrible than to less sensitive natures, but He gave Himself up to it as an offering and a willing sacrifice. He literally poured out His very life unto death, and the one extenuating feature in it all was that instead of being buried with the wicked, He was with the rich in His death and the tomb of Joseph was offered as the resting place of His lifeless form.

7. But the bitterest dregs of His cup of sorrow were yet to come. These were caused by the Father’s stroke. “It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; you have put Him to grief.” For that dreadful moment He stood in the place of guilty men and it was their day of judgment. Therefore upon His single head there fell the judgment stroke which the guilty world deserved. He bore our hell and in that awful moment for an instant His heart was crushed. When our dark hours come to us, we can bear anything if we have His presence. But when death was creeping over Him, and demons were tormenting Him and men were torturing Him, He reached out for His Father’s hand, He looked up for His Father’s smile and all was darkness and wrath, and He uttered that bitter cry,

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” “He was made sin for us who knew no sin.”

“Jehovah lifted up His rod,

O Christ, it fell on Thee;

Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God.

Thy bruising healeth me;

A victim led, my Savior bled,

Now there's no curse for me."

8. The travail of His soul. Christ's deepest anguish was inward. He was going through a great soul conflict of responsibility, desire and intense prayer for the salvation of men. The whole weight of the world's redemption was resting upon His heart. It was the birth hour of heaven. Had He failed, hope would have died for every human soul and heaven been draped in mourning. That awful weight was upon Him. All His life long He bore it, but in the last and crisis hour it absorbed His being with the anguish of a travailing woman. The twenty-second psalm gives a little picture of that conflict. There is a strange expression there, "Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog." Who was His darling? It was His beloved Bride. It was the Church that He was holding in His arms from the fearful attack of her foe, and His one last thought was "To save others though Himself He could not save." He did, but oh, the awful cost; what tongue can tell!

II. The fruit of His sorrow.

First as it affects us:

1. It brings us deliverance from sickness. "Surely He has borne our sicknesses."
2. It brings us victory over sorrow. "He carried our sorrows."
3. It brings us the forgiveness of our transgressions. "He was wounded for our transgressions."
4. It brings us salvation from the power of sin. "He was bruised for our iniquity," the power of indwelling sin.
5. It brings us peace. "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him."
6. It brings us justification. "By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many."
7. It brings us His intercession. "He made intercession for the transgressors."
8. It brings salvation for the nations. "So shall He sprinkle many nations."

What a rich and glorious salvation is thus provided, covering all our temporal and spiritual needs, and large as the world itself in its boundless fulness.

Second, as it affects Him:

1. "He shall prolong His days." This refers to His resurrection, ascension and "the power of an endless life" which has been given Him.
2. "He shall see His seed." This refers to His spiritual offspring. There are two races in the world today, the Adam race and the Christ race. The Adam race is doomed. The Christ race is redeemed. Christians are the seed of Jesus, born of His very being and partners of His own life.
3. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." This refers to the great mediatorial work given Him by the Father which is the reward of His sufferings and which He is carrying on with victorious power until His Kingdom shall have been established in all the world.
4. The spoils of victory. "You shall divide Him a portion with the great and He shall divide the spoil with the strong because He has poured out His soul unto death." As the reward of His conflict and suffering, He is to share the spoils of victory over Satan and all His foes. Among them are the restitution of this lost world which Satan had captured for a time and claimed to rule as its lord. Christ has overcome him by the cross and is finishing His triumph through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit, and the vision of prophecy has revealed to us the final triumph when the enemy shall be forever imprisoned in the lake of fire and all the things that he has wrecked shall be restored in

"the days of the restitution of all things." Then shall that sublime vision of the Apocalypse be fulfilled, "I saw heaven opened and, behold, a white horse and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns, and He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God, and, He has on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

5. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." Tell me how much would satisfy your heart for this sin-cursed world, and then I will tell you something of what would satisfy the heart of Jesus. But you could tell me nothing if you were to talk for a thousand years that would even faintly approximate all the joy, the victory, the glory which these words imply for earth and heaven, for our ransomed race and our Redeemer's heart of love. All this He saw as He hung that day on Calvary and the prospect took away the bitterness of the cross.

"He could see the ransomed throng,

He could hear their rapturous song

Rolling through the ages long;

He could see His glorious Bride

Saved and seated by His side,

And His soul was satisfied."

Shall we help to satisfy His soul?

Chapter 22 – Christ, Conqueror, Savior and Sufferer

“Why are you red in your apparel, and your garments like him that treads in the wine vat? I have trodden the winepress alone.” (Isa. 63: 2-3).

Three pictures of the Lord Jesus are given in this splendid poetic vision.

I. The Conqueror. It is a picture of the hero warrior coming back from the conflict with Edom, Israel's traditional foe. It is a picture of the conqueror, not the warrior, that we see. The battle is over. The carnage, the struggle, the horrors of the battlefield are all behind Him. It is only as a victor that He appears, marching in splendid majesty, “glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength.”

The picture is true to the whole analogy of prophecy and the whole story of redemption. It is all one long battle from Edom to Armageddon. The first promise of redemption is the prophecy of a battle between the seed of the woman and the serpent, the emissary of Satan. The conflict between Moses and Pharaoh, Israel and Amalek, Joshua and the Canaanites, David and his enemies, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and the kings of Judah: all these were but types of that greater battle raging in the heavenly places and leading on to the final triumph of the Son of God and the setting up of His millennial throne. The life of every Christian is but a section of this great conflict. It is renewed from generation to generation and age to age and every Christian must be a soldier as well as a saint.

But the point of the whole prophetic picture is not so much the conflict as the Conqueror. The figure that stands in the front is the victorious Christ, the battle fought, the triumph won and the enemy destroyed. The lesson for us is that the battle is not ours, but God's, and that the battle has been won for us already by Him and we go into every conflict with the prestige of victory assured. Just as David met Goliath single-handed, and as the champion of Israel defeated the army of the Philistines by defeating their leader, so the Son of God has won for us the great victory of redemption, and it is our privilege to enter into His victory and go into every conflict saying, “Thanks be unto God who always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus.”

Are we thus taking His victory and entering into the triumph of His cross? It is our glorious privilege so to do. Then we need never know defeat or doubt or fear, but shall meet Satan as a conquered foe and ourselves be “more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

The prominence of Edom in this conflict is very significant. Edom stands for the flesh, our greatest spiritual foe. In this connection there is a remarkable passage in the seventeenth chapter of Exodus describing Israel's first conflict with the race of Edom, Amalek. This was typical of the battle which God has ever been waging against the flesh and the power of sin. This battle was not won by human valor, but by divine power. Only while Moses held up his hands did Israel prevail, and when his hands grew heavy and fell down, then Amalek prevailed. It was to teach us that we are to overcome our spiritual adversaries not by our energy, but by the uplifted hands of faith, claiming the supernatural power of God. This battle was to be permanent. “The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation,” and we find this true in every stage of our Christian career.

But in the marginal reading of this verse there is a striking expression which confirms the teaching that we have just been giving. "Because the hand is upon the throne of the Amalek from generation to generation." The hand upon the throne of the Lord represents the hand of faith taking God Himself for the victory, and when this is the case and our hand is there, then the Lord fights our battle and comes from Edom evermore "traveling in the greatness of His strength," "mighty to save."

Shall we learn the lesson of His victory? Shall we follow the Captain of our salvation, and "in all these things be more than conquerors through Him that loved us"?

II. The Savior.

"I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." (Is. 63: 1.) This is not a selfish conflict like most human wars, for personal ambition and earthly power and renown. Oh, how human blood has flowed and human hearts have ached that some selfish hero might be called earth's greatest conqueror. There are some wars that have been undertaken, not for ambition, but for the deliverance of an oppressed and captive people. Such is the great conflict of redemption. Our mighty Captain has come forth to fight the battle of a lost world and to rescue us from the powers of darkness, and He conquers only that He may save. He is the Champion of the oppressed and it is written of Him, "He shall save the children of the needy and shall break in pieces the oppressor; He shall deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also and him that has no helper."

The prophet tells us four things about His great salvation.

1. He is a righteous Savior. He does not override the claims of justice, but He is "a just God and a Savior." He has recognized the claims of God's law against sinful men and has fully met them. He has paid the penalty of sin in His own person and by His death upon the cross. He has fulfilled for us a broken law and presented to God a perfect righteousness in our stead and the salvation He gives to us is not merely the obliterating of the record against us but a complete settlement of every claim which justifies us in the sight of God and enables us to say, "Who is he that condemns; who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

2. He is a mighty Savior. He has overcome all the obstacles that interposed and there is no case too hard for His power. He saves us from the guilt of sin and the wrath of God against it. He saves us from the fear of punishment. He saves us from the defiling power of sin in our hearts and purifies and cleanses our nature. He saves us from the physical effects of sin and is the Healer of the body as well as the Redeemer of the soul. He saves us from the consequences of our sin and restores to us "the years the locust has eaten," and the opportunities that our folly threw away. He saves us from the fear of death and raises us to a higher glory than we could have ever known if sin had not come. He is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." He is able to save from the uttermost, too. There is no soul too lost, there is no heart too hard for Him to conquer. He can save our loved ones and rescue the captives of the mighty from the very jaws of the destroyer.

3. He is the only Savior. "I looked and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me and my fury, it upheld me." (Is. 63: 5.)

4. There is a strange blending here of salvation with destruction. "The day of vengeance is in mine

heart and the year of my redeemed is come.” (Is. 63: 4.) This is really one of the underlying principles of the plan of redemption. It is a salvation through destruction. This is the very significance of the cross. It is life through death, victory through seeming defeat, and joy through sorrow. It was thus that the antediluvian world was saved “by water,” that is, through the destruction of the sin that was engulfing it. It was thus that Israel was saved from Egypt by the death stroke that smote the first born. It was thus that humanity was saved on the cross by the death of Christ, and all our sinful nature with Him, and it is thus that each of us is saved by going through death to life through the power of His grace. So finally the material world is to be saved by fire and the destruction of the present economy is to usher in “the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness.”

III. The Sufferer.

But this was a costly victory. This Conqueror has not easily won His splendid triumph and saved His captive people. “Why are you red in your apparel and your garments like him that treads in the wine vat? I have trodden the winepress alone.” (Is. 63: 2, 3.) While a severe exegesis might insist upon the application of this figure wholly to the sufferings of His foes, yet the beautiful Christian sentiment that has always associated it with the sufferings of the Redeemer cannot be set aside, and His grateful and ransomed people will always associate this pathetic verse with the agony of the garden and the cross.

The peculiar feature, however, of Christ’s sufferings emphasized in this passage, is their solitariness. “I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Me.” (Is. 63: 3.) The very greatness of Christ and the loftiness of His nature separated Him inevitably from others both in His sufferings and in His deepest life. His lofty nature made Him peculiarly sensitive to things that we would not so deeply feel. To Him the world of sin and sorrow was wholly strange and new. On his finer sensitiveness, the rudeness, coarseness and wrongness of every earthly thing must have grated with a strange pain. Above all, the presence of sin and His identification with it, must have been a hideous agony to the holy nature of the Son of God. To be treated as a malefactor, to be counted worthy of the shame that the vilest sinner deserved, “to be made sin for us who knew no sin,” to be judged by His Father as an accursed one and to go down for a little while into the very realms of Hades, and touch for a moment our very hell; all these were elements in the peculiar sufferings of the Son of God which human hearts can never comprehend. Then, besides, He was left in utter desolation in His darkest hour. His disciples forsook Him and fled. Peter denied Him. Judas betrayed Him, and even His Father covered His face with a cloud and for a little while poured upon His head the judgment that sinners deserved. Truly He was treading “the winepress alone.”

Surely it is fitting that those who love Him should often go apart and gaze upon that spectacle of sorrow while they hear Him saying, “All you that pass by look and see if there is any sorrow like My sorrow wherewith the Lord has afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.”

The very design of the Lord’s Supper is to keep alive the tender recollection of His passion and to do this in remembrance of Him.

There are two practical lessons for us in connection with this subject.

1. The place of suffering in our life. The greatest mystery about the gospel is that Jesus, that most innocent of beings, was the greatest sufferer, and His suffering is His supreme glory. It is equally true

of us that suffering must be part of our discipline and our glory too. While there were sufferings which He had to bear alone, there are others which He shares with us. We can have no part in that sacrificial offering by which He once for all redeemed us and saved us, but we can have a part in the travail of His soul which, as our great High Priest, He is forever bearing in the conflict of the ages and the accomplishment of redemption. On yonder heavenly throne He is still suffering in sympathy with His people and in prayer for the completion of His redemption. That is the burden which we may share with Him. It was of this Paul said, "I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind in all the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church."

Every soul that is converted, every victory that is won for the cause of Christ costs Him the travail of His soul, and we, His body, can bear that travail with Him. This is the meaning of the ministry of prayer. This is the meaning of the burden of suffering which He lays upon the hearts that are willing to watch and weep with Him. Shall we enter into this holy ministry and thus be partakers of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that shall follow?

2. The solitariness of our life. The Master was alone in the deepest tragedy of His life and every true follower of Jesus must also learn to be often alone. There are sufferings that will come to us that no other can share. There are experiences that no other can understand. There are confidences between us and our Lord that no human soul can share. Shall we go with Him along the solitary way? Many of us are there now. Let us not be discouraged, but remember the lone Master who went before us, saying, "Yet I am not alone for My Father is with Me."

"Ah, be not sad although thy lot be cast

Far from the fold, and in a boundless waste

No shepherd's tents within thy view appear;

But the chief Shepherd even there is near.

Thy tender sorrow and thy plaintive strain

Flow in a foreign land, but not in vain

Thy tears all issue from a source divine,

And every drop bespeaks a Savior thine."

Chapter 23 – Isaiah’s Gospel

“Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money; come, buy and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” (Isa. 55: 1-3.)

The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah naturally follows the fifty-third as the proclamation of the Gospel follows the cross of Calvary and the completed atonement.

The chapter opens with a business note, in fact, it is like an announcement from an Oriental bargain counter. The Jews had already begun to learn from their relation with the Babylonians those commercial lessons which have made them ever since the great traders of the world. Like an Eastern merchant offering his wares to the passerby, the prophet cries, “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, come buy and eat without money and without price.” It is indeed a great bargain that He is offering — everything for nothing.

I. What He offers. In a word, it is the gospel in all the fulness of its blessings.

1. The waters represent the more ordinary and essential blessings of the gospel; its cleansing and satisfying streams of life and salvation.

2. Wine represents rather the cordials and comforts and the special provisions which Christ has made for the sick, the suffering and the feeble. “Give wine to him that is ready to perish,” is the prescription of the Hebrew sage. And so wine represents the richer, choicer things which the Holy Spirit gives to the hearts that are prepared.

3. Milk. This is food for babes. This is the gospel’s provision for the little children. This is the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus whose salvation is adapted alike to the humblest child and the loftiest sage.

4. The feast of fat things. “Eat that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” The gospel has the choicest blessings, the supreme joys, and, best of all, the power to quicken our being so that we can take in these higher blessings and our capacity for enjoyment is immeasurably enlarged as well as the means to satisfy it.

5. Life in all its deep and everlasting meaning. “Hear and your soul shall live.” (Is. 55: 3.) Life for the soul, life for the spirit, life more abundantly, life forever more, eternal life “begun on earth and perfect in the skies.”

6. Forgiveness of sins, mercy and pardon. “He will have mercy upon him.” “He will abundantly pardon.” (Is. 55:7.)

7. The covenanted life. "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." (Is. 55: 3.) The ungodly has no security for the future. The sinner knows not what a day may bring forth. Life has nothing guaranteed and eternity is still more uncertain and unsafe. The unsaved man is adrift upon a shoreless ocean, at the mercy of every wind and tide. But the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has a covenanted life. His future is guaranteed and he knows that all is well. Of the one it is said, "Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2: 12.) And of the other it is true, "I am persuaded that neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8: 38, 39.) "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose." (Rom. 8: 28.)

8. Joy and Peace. "For you shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break before you into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." (Is. 55: 12.) This is the life of triumph. The mountains stand for difficulties; the trees for the fruits of our lives. Everything shall fall in line with the triumphant future of the children of God and earth and heaven claim their "abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

9. Victory over trial and suffering. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree and instead of the briar the myrtle tree." (Is. 55: 13.) This is the promise of the transformation of evil into good and the curse into a blessing. The thorn and the briar represent the bitter present ills of life, but these shall be so overruled and so counteracted that we shall meet them in the land beyond as palms of victory and myrtles of beauty and the very trees that shall adorn our home in paradise shall be made out of the thorns and briars of our earthly wilderness.

Oh, what a gospel this is that can turn the world upside down and transmute the darkest, saddest things into memorials of blessing and voices of everlasting praise.

II. The persons to whom this offer is made.

1. The thirsty. "Ho, everyone that thirsts." (Is. 55: 1.) These are the souls that have grown weary of this vain and empty world and found its promises and even its pleasures "vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit." How unsatisfying are all earthly things. Their chief enjoyment consists in their pursuit. Their attainment leaves us sated, tired and ready for some new excitement. How pathetic the cry of that weary heart that had gone from flower to flower in her reckless pursuit of pleasure and yet was compelled to cry, "Lord, give me to drink of this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."

2. The poor. "He that has no money, come." (Is. 55: 1.) This means the poor in spirit, the people that have nothing to give in return for the mercy of God. He asks nothing but our poverty, our helplessness and the opportunity of saving us, blessing us and making our lives happy and receiving back the recompense of our joy and our praise. You are not really ready to come until you find your poverty and are willing to say:

"Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to Your cross I cling;

Naked, come to You for dress,

Helpless, look to You for grace;

Foul, I to the fountain fly,

Wash me, Savior, or I die.”

3. The deceived. “Why spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not?” (Is. 55: 2.) You have been fooled by the tempter. You have sought, in the broken cisterns of earth, to quench your thirst and they have all disappointed you. Perhaps you have been more cruelly deceived by wicked men, unprincipled women and a false and selfish world. Come to Him. He will never deceive you. Why should you pay so much and get so little when He has all to give and nothing to ask but your trust and love?

4. The sinner. “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” (Is. 55: 7.) Human societies are looking out for the people that have references and can show their good standing. Christ is looking out for people that have no standing. Here is one place you are welcome in proportion to your unworthiness. It is passing strange indeed, but wonderful and divine.

“This man receives sinners and eats with them.” Are you unworthy? Are you conscious of wrong? Are you tired of sinning? There is welcome for you.

III. The terms and conditions on which we are invited.

1. It is all free. There is nothing to pay. Even our future life of love and service is not a recompense but a grateful and loving return. We are not accepted and saved because we are going to be good, but because we are utterly bad and our goodness is but the offering up of our grateful love. It is grace, grace alone; love for the unlovely; help for the helpless and everything for nothing.

2. The first step to God is to hearken. “Hear, and your soul shall live; hearken diligently unto Me.” (Is. 55: 3, 2). The greatest hindrances to true life are inattention, insensibility, indifference and hardness of heart. Our ears are deafened by the voices of the world. Our minds are absorbed by the vanities of earth. We do not really give attention to the things of God. The round of fashion; the routine of daily duty; the rush of life drive us along like a great torrent and we come to the end of life before we really awake to its solemn meaning. Therefore God calls us aloud: “Ho, hearken, incline your ear, hear and your soul shall live,” and the Holy Spirit waits, “Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”

3. The first thing we are invited to do is to come. This is an approach to God, a move toward Him. Anything that brings us nearer is coming: the putting forth of desire; the stretching out a hand; the kneeling in prayer of a penitent and a suppliant; the movement forward to the altar of the inquirer or better than all, the lifting up of the heart to God and the reaching out of the soul in earnest prayer. Come any way at all, but come, and “He that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out.”

4. Buy. This means to appropriate; to make it your own; to put your name in it; to claim it. The things you purchase are yours. So we must take Christ and His salvation. We must not only ask for it, but we must say, "It is mine," and we must begin to act and think as though it were ours. You don't have to pay for it, and yet you buy it. The price has been paid by another, and it becomes yours, not as a charity but as a redemption right, and you can look in the face of a just and holy God and claim it and know that He cannot refuse to give it to you not only as a matter of grace, but as a matter of justice and right inasmuch as it has been purchased for you by the precious blood of His only begotten Son.

5. Eat. This is more than buying. This is beginning to enjoy your purchase. This is getting the good of it and taking into your life the comfort, the strength, the joy which you have claimed by faith, and it is your privilege to know by actual experience as well.

6. "Seek the Lord." This is for the souls that are far away. They may not find Him at once, but they are to continue to seek, to press their suit and to wait upon Him until they receive the fulness of His blessing. He is not far from the earnest seeker. "Seek the Lord while He may be found," and found He shall surely be.

7. "Call upon Him." This represents prayer. It is thus that we shall find Him, on our knees and at the throne of grace. Anybody can call. It is the cry of distress. It needs no science or education, but a deep sense of need and a simple confidence that there is some One sure to hear and answer. "Call upon Him while He is near."

8. Turn from sin to God. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him turn to the Lord." This is repentance. There must be an actual forsaking of sin. There must be an honest turning to God. There must be an uncompromising "No" to the devil and the world and the flesh and the voice of sin and temptation; and there must be an everlasting "Yes" to God in all His good and holy will. Without this our own conscience and sense of right forbid us to expect an answer or a blessing; but acting thus no past transgression, no record of sin, no imperfection of your faith or your prayer, no possible barrier can keep you back from His mercy and His blessing. "He will have mercy upon you; He will abundantly pardon."

IV. God's appeal.

1. The waste of life. "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not?" (Is. 55: 2.) He pleads with us to give up the foolish waste of life on things that do not profit and to take the things that alone are worth living for. Oh, how cheaply we sell our souls! It is said that Rowland Hill, while preaching in the open air one day, was attracted by the passing of Lady Erskine, a distinguished duchess. Suddenly he stopped in his discourse and striking the pose of an auctioneer, he said,

"Lady Erskine's soul is for sale. Who will have it? Ah, Satan, you are bidding. You will give the world, pleasure, honor; every earthly attraction. But I hear another voice. It is the voice of the Lord Jesus. 'I have given My life for her, and I will give to her eternal life.' Lady Erskine, who shall have your soul?"

And the duchess cried out, "Mr. Hill, the Lord Jesus shall have my soul, for He has paid the greater

price and offers the richer boon.”

Oh, shall we waste our real treasures and throw ourselves away for the tinsel of a passing world?

2. He appeals by His own great love. “My thoughts are not your thoughts nor your ways My ways.” We may not be able to understand how God can give away so much for so little. It may seem too good to be true, but it is not. It is just like Him, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

“How Thou canst think so well of us

And be the God Thou art

Is darkness to my intellect,

But sunshine to my heart”

3. His unfailing Word. “My Word shall not return unto Me void,” He says. We can trust this promise. We can take Him at His Word and He will never, never fail us. Shall we do so? Shall we put our names in these great promises?

Shall we claim this rich inheritance? Shall we accept the gospel of Isaiah which is the precious gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

Chapter 24 – The Right and Wrong Way of Living

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me and eat that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” (Is. 55: 2.)

This passage tells us of misdirected effort and wasted strength. There is a coarse and brutal way in which multitudes are thus spending their “money for that which is not bread,” and their “labor for that which satisfies not,” in sensual indulgence and degrading vice. But there are also more refined and respectable ways in which multitudes are throwing away their lives and getting nothing at last but the empty shells.

One is reminded of the story told by Lord Dufferin about his Irish estate. There was a fine old castle on the land which was exposed to neglect and depredation through lack of a protecting wall. The old ruin was of great value and the noble lord desired to preserve it at a heavy cost. So before leaving for India, he gave instructions to his steward to have a fine substantial wall erected all around it. On his return from India he went to see the estate and inspect the old castle, but found to his dismay that the castle had entirely disappeared and there was just a great modern wall of solid masonry enclosing nothing but the site of the old ruin. He called the steward and asked him what he had done with the castle that he valued so highly. “Och !” said he, “that ould thing. I just pulled it down and used the materials to build the wall.”

The gifted lord used often to tell the humorous story and find in it a fine illustration of the way in which so many people were destroying the real treasures of life and putting their strength and energy into that which was but a mere shell to hold something else which had been overlooked and neglected. Not unlike the thoughtlessness of the steward was the conduct of a little girl in England who got a half crown given her by a friend and immediately went and spent it to buy a purse to hold the money in. When she got home she found a purse but nothing to put in it.

So multitudes are spending life with its infinite possibilities in merely providing the outward forms of things to discover at last that the real values have been quite forgotten. How often we find higher culture and education simply providing a lot of empty shells, qualities which have no practical value either in producing happiness or power. How often we see money spent lavishly in accumulating the mere materials of life; houses, lands, equipage, income and the whole machinery of life; but when it is all accomplished, it is hollow at heart. There are houses, but they are not homes, for there is not love to hallow them. There are the means of gratification, but there is no pleasure, for selfishness has destroyed the secret of true happiness.

Saddest of all is the waste of religious effort. What is ceremony and form without real devotion and love! How empty the pageant of a splendid ritual when behind it is the skeleton of a dead church and a Christless soul! Not more cold and cheerless are the marble monuments in the cemetery and the gilded spires on the cathedral above the worshipper’s head. It is all like the vision of the valley of dry bones: the forms of men, but there is no life in them.

Dear friend, are you spending your life in simply building walls with nothing to enclose; in buying purses that only hide their own emptiness; in making picture frames while the picture itself is absent, and in spending existence in one endless round of busy toil and anxious pursuit of happiness and success, to find at last, like the preacher in Ecclesiastes, that your vision has faded like a dream, that your life is but a scaffolding and the building has not yet even been begun and that there is nothing left but to sit in the chill winter of despair, and cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit?"

What then, is the real object of life? What is there that is worth living for and expending our strength to realize and accomplish?

I. The first object of life is to find God and to be rightly adjusted to Him. As the flower needs the sun; as the birdling needs its mother; as the infant perishes without a parent's love and care, so the human soul was made for God and never can rest until it rests in Him. The worlds of space all circle round their proper suns. There is a center of gravitation for everything and when any planet loses this bond, it becomes a wandering star and drifts into darkness and destruction.

God is our center and our sun. Faith is the great bond that holds us to our orbit and without that we are "wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." The object of the gospel is to bring man back to God; to restore the bond of confidence and bring us into our true place of trust and obedience to Him. Then we truly begin to live. Then our hearts find the source of its happiness and God pours into us that fulness of love and blessing which we were made to receive.

This must all begin by that simple trust that blots out our sin and brings us into fellowship and confidence with Him. Then the Holy Spirit reestablishes the vital bond of love and union and God fills us with His own nature and we blossom and bud and bear fruit like the vine that has found its congenial soil and reached the fountains from which it draws its vital support.

Until this comes to pass, everything in life is vain. Our efforts are misdirected; our toil is wasted; our struggles are vain. We are but marking time like the soldier who stands on a pivot while the army centers round him. We are making no progress, or to adopt the figure of the text, we are "spending our money for that which is not bread and our labor for that which satisfies not."

Oh, wandering hearts, come home to God. Accept His reconciling love. Become His children. Receive His Spirit and return to your true place of rest and satisfaction. God needs you to receive His fulness, and you need Him to fill the void which no created thing can ever fill.

II. The second thing in life is to find yourself and rise to your true ideal of character and power.

When we find God, then we also find ourselves. How many people have never yet discovered the treasure of their own existence. It is buried like a jewel in the refuse of a filthy room. How true it is, "A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses." The prodigal sought for happiness in dissipation, but he only lost himself and the first step in his restoration was when it could be said of him, "He came to himself." How many have lost themselves like him in earthly pleasure, sensual indulgence, the greed of gain, the whirl of fashion, the wild race for earthly success! Vainly too, you seek for your true self in mere intellectual culture. You will not find a true man and

woman there. The intellect is but the lamp that lights the chambers of the soul, but the guest is deeper and further than this. It is that immortal spirit that came from God, that belongs to eternity and that can only be filled with the infinite and everlasting. Sometimes men get a flash of the glory of the true nature which is hidden within them. How finely Victor Hugo used to say, "The winter of age is upon my head, but eternal springtime is in my heart. I feel within my soul the symphonies of the age to come. My work is only beginning. I feel in myself a future life. Heaven lights me with the sunshine of unseen worlds. I am rising, I know, toward the sky."

Beloved, have you found that glorious life? Have you brought it into contact with Him and have you truly begun to live in the highest sense?

John Newton tells of a night that he lay in his hammock on the Adriatic Sea after a fearful spell of wild debauchery. In a lurid dream, he saw himself throwing away his soul into the sea like a precious jewel at the daring of Satan, and as it sank beneath the waves, a fiendish shout went up from the pit and a flash of angry fire seemed to light up the mountain tops along the shore. His spirit sank within him and he felt that he had lost his soul, buried forever a treasure more precious than all the world.

Then, in his dream, his Savior seemed to stand before him and asked him if he wished to have that jewel recovered once more. He threw himself at His feet and earnestly pleaded for Him to save it if He could. Then the Redeemer leaped into the flood, battled with the waves, sank beneath the surges and at last, wearied and panting, rose and reached the deck, holding in His hand the precious gem. Eagerly the sailor reached out his hand to grasp it, but the Master held him back and said, "No, I will keep it now for you. If I gave it to you, you would but sacrifice it again and when life is done I will have it for you at the gates of heaven safe forevermore."

And from that vision that drunken sailor went forth to become the sweetest of the saints of God, to write the hallowed hymns that have been singing men and women to glory for a century, and to leave behind him the luster of a life more precious than earth's fairest gems.

Oh, men and women, each of you has such a treasure. Have you truly found it and are you letting God keep it, polish it and prepare it for the highest possibilities of earth and the richest glories of heaven?

There is nothing on earth worth half so much as men. After Christ Himself, the things we value most are human souls. We would give the world for one of them. How beautiful are they to God; as precious as the blood He shed for them, and sometime to become as glorious as He in the coming age. Each of us is such a treasure. God help us to know ourselves, to find our true value and to be God's best.

III. The third object of life is to find our work and be occupied with the best and highest things. Man was made for activity and the powers of the human mind surpass all possible conception.

The Master's great business was to finish His work. The apostle's supreme motive was "that I may finish my course with joy and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus to testify of the Gospel of the grace of God." Have we found our calling? Are we pouring out our life into other lives? Are we leaving behind us fruits that shall remain and work into which shall be crystalized the best that we could be and do?

Mother: Perhaps your work is to leave one child, the blossom of your being, to accomplish in years to come mightier things than you could even dream. So the holy Monica loved, suffered, waited, prayed, until her one boy, Augustine, became the blossom of her life and she passed away, leaving him to speak for her, to live for her and to live out her life on earth. So the century plant spends one hundred years preparing for one supreme effort and at last produces a single flower, gorgeous beyond description, and blossoms and dies.

Wife: Are you living out your life meekly, gently, unselfishly by love, by help, by prayer in the man to whom God has linked you as the helpmeet of his great struggle? Can there be a nobler ambition than to be the power behind the scenes, the vital force, the inspiring impulse of a life which is but the expression of your silence, your suffering and your love?

Christian Worker: Has your being been poured out in some great and noble work which God has given you and which you are leaving behind you to bless humanity when you yourself shall have passed from earthly view? Some time ago there passed through New York an old man on his way to China, who for forty years had lived but for one thing: to plant the Gospel in the unopened provinces of that vast empire, and from this faith and love had sprung the China Inland Mission, with its hundreds of missionaries and its thousands of converts. His last desire was to end his days in China and on his way across the Atlantic, a traveling companion has told how he used to talk every day with exulting joy of the delusions that had taken possession of his failing mind, namely, that all the passengers and crew upon the steamer were missionaries to China, and he would laugh aloud in his joy that so many hundreds of new missionaries were about to be added to the force in that land. The ruling passion was strong in death and with this sublime enthusiasm overbalancing his weakened mind he passed on to interior China and in its furthest province, where his glorious spirit went up to be with God. He had found his life work and he has left it as a memorial more lasting than the monuments of Egypt.

God help us to find our Savior, to find ourselves, and to find our work,

“And, departing, leave behind us

Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints which perhaps another

Traveling o’er life’s solemn main,

Some forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

Seeing, may take heart again.”

Chapter 25 – The Fourfold Gospel in Isaiah

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” (Is. 53: 5.)

I. Salvation.

The first picture of Isaiah begins with sin and salvation. What an indictment against the sinner is contained in the opening appeal, “ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should you be stricken any more?

You will revolt more and more; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.” (Is. 1: 4-6.) But what a message of mercy and salvation, “Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool.” (Is. 1: 18.)

Again, what a glorious gospel of salvation is contained in Isaiah 53: 5, 6. “But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isa. 53: 5, 6.) How many it has brought to lay their sins upon Him and to come back to the Shepherd and the fold.

Where shall we find a more complete and attractive gospel invitation than Isaiah 55: 1, 2, 6, 7. “Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money; come, buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

How rich the metaphors under which the gospel is presented, water, wine and milk! How fine the figures of buying without money because someone else has paid the price, and eating until our soul delights itself in fatness! How infinite the grace that calls the wicked to forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and to return unto the Lord who will abundantly pardon!

How the call of the Jubilee rings through that splendid passage in Isaiah 61: 1, 2: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

This was the very text from which our Lord Himself preached His first sermon at Nazareth and it is the commission of every minister of the Gospel.

And finally, how stirring and awakening is the call in Isaiah 45: 22: “Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” How it takes us back to the serpent in the wilderness and the third chapter of the Gospel of John, and how many eyes have turned at the call of this heavenly summons to “look and live.” Surely, Isaiah is the gospel for the sinner as well as for the saint.

II. Sanctification.

The call of the prophet recorded in the sixth chapter of Isaiah is a testimony of sanctification. It began with a vision of God, and, as the result, a vision of himself in all the depths of his sinfulness as it stood revealed in the white light of the throne. Then came the cry, “woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

And then came the baptism of fire, the live coal upon his lips, which even the seraphim could not touch with their hands, and the glorious announcement,

“lo, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.” Then with sanctified ears and lips and feet he was ready to hear and obey the great commission that sent him forth to his long and glorious ministry. God must have holy ears and lips and feet to carry His messages and represent Him to the world.

The same high standard of holiness is required from all the servants of the Lord. The Bible contains no finer portrait of the righteous man than Isaiah 33: 15-17: “He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly; he that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.” This man who “walks righteously and speaks uprightly” and who not only avoids evil himself but shuts his eyes and ears from seeing and hearing evil, he shall enter in to the beatific vision, which so sublimely anticipates the parallel promise of the sermon on the mount, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

How finely the highway of holiness is described in Isaiah 35: 8, 9: “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there.” How suggestively the figure of the highway, not the broad way, not the ordinary way, trodden even by the ordinary pilgrim, but the narrow path where the separated ones walk alone with Jesus. How simple their life. They do not need to be wise or strong. They are wayfaring men and often counted fools by the world, but they have learned the secret of the skies and they walk in safety with the ransomed to their everlasting home.

There is a fine passage in Isaiah 41: 10, which suggests three progressive stages of our deeper life.

The first is expressed by the promise, “I will strengthen you,” the second by the clause, “yes, I will help you,” but the third reaches a higher plane where God’s strength and help are not sufficient, but, where, ceasing altogether from ourselves we fall helpless into His almighty arms and He just “upholds us with the right hand of His righteousness,” that is, carries us altogether in His own everlasting arms.

There is a still finer passage in Isaiah 44: 3-5: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.” Here there are two types of spiritual life distinctly contrasted. The first are those who say “I am the Lord’s” and “call themselves by the name of Jacob.” This represents the experience of conversion, the Jacob life. These people are undoubtedly God’s people, but they have not yet reached their Peniel. The second class, however, have passed with Jacob through the gates of Peniel and come forth into the higher place of victory and entire consecration, “another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord and call himself by the name of Israel.” All through this book of Isaiah we can trace these two types. How differently he speaks of them. Notice for example his striking words, “the Lord has redeemed Jacob and glorified Himself in Israel.”

Poor Jacob is not forgotten or discarded because he has not got further on. The Lord goes with His people even through the wilderness. But “He has glorified Himself in Israel,” the life that is wholly surrendered and transformed, and showing forth “the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

These passages are sufficient to show the deep insight of the prophet’s vision and the high and holy plane on which he himself walked and which he ever recognized as God’s true pattern for all His children.

III. Divine Healing.

There is no lack of material for the gospel of healing in the great Messianic prophet Isaiah. The foundation passage is, of course, Isaiah 53: 4, 5; “Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.” This is the only verse in the chapter prefixed by the word “surely.” This is God’s great Amen to the truth proclaimed in this passage. The Holy Spirit emphasized it because He knew it was the truth that was to be questioned by the belief of later generations. There is no doubt about the literal reference of this passage to the redemption of our bodies. The word translated “griefs” literally means sicknesses and is so translated in scores of parallel passages in the Old Testament. The word “borne” is the same as that used in the twelfth verse of this chapter with reference to Christ’s atonement for sin, “He bare the sin of many.” In Matt. 8: 17, this passage is translated “Himself took our sicknesses and bare our infirmities.” The fifth verse gives a catalogue of the blessings of redemption, “He was wounded for our transgressions,” that is our acts of sin,

“He was bruised for our iniquities,” that is our heart of sin, “the chastisement of our peace was upon

Him,” that is the spiritual blessings which His death has purchased, and, finally, “by His stripes we are healed,” that is the physical effects of His redemption. Here then we have the fulness of Christ’s atonement. To say that the last clause respecting healing means spiritual healing would be to make the sentence a barren repetition of what he had already said in the first part of the verse.

In Isaiah 57: 18, 19, we have another reference to the Lord’s healing. “I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, says the Lord; and I will heal him.”

Here it is evident that the sickness had been caused by sin and that God had been dealing with the transgressor in chastening, “for the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him.” But repentance has come and the erring one has learned his lesson and returned to God and now God’s promise is “I have seen his ways and will heal him.” His healing is followed by deeper spiritual experiences, “I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and unto his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to him that is far off and to him that is near.” This, in turn, is followed by further healing, “and I will heal him.” As we know God more deeply through the teaching of the Holy Spirit we come into a profounder experience of His healing touch and power. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death.”

There is another passage in Isaiah 58: 8-11, which leads us into the deeper experiences of the Lord’s life for the body. “Your health shall spring forth speedily,” is a fine figure of the springing life that comes to us through union and communion with the Lord Jesus. “The Lord shall make fat your bones and you shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not;” This represents that inner nourishment which the indwelling Christ supplies to all our vital being, making fat our bones, not in the sense of mere physical flesh and increased weight and muscular strength, but that inner freshness and fulness of life which lifts us above exhaustion and disease and renews our youth like the eagles’.

IV. The Lord’s Coming in Isaiah.

Isaiah xi. 1-16 is a picture of Messiah’s reign in the millennial age, the restoration of Israel and the transformation of the material world and the whole system of nature. Righteousness, peace and universal blessedness shall pervade the world and the “knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.”

Isaiah 32: 1-3, is a similar picture of the millennial earth when “a king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

Isaiah 24: 20-23, is strikingly parallel to the closing chapters of Revelation and the vision of the coming of the Son of Man. “The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion,

and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously.” How vividly this describes the shaking of the powers of heaven at the coming of the Lord and the appearance of Christ in His glory!

Then comes in Isaiah 25: 7-9, His appearing to Israel and the removing of the veil that has been upon the face of all people. Then in Isaiah 26: 19, comes the vision of the resurrection, “your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust: for your dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead,” followed by the rapture of His saints as they are got away from the great tribulation which is coming upon the earth. “Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you: hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.”

Isaiah has given us a striking object lesson of divine healing in the story of Hezekiah, and his remarkable healing as described in Isaiah 38. In considering this let us notice:

1. That Hezekiah’s sickness was a fatal one. It is foolish to talk about his being healed through a mere poultice of figs of a disease that was declared by God Himself to be unto death.
2. In describing this event in the book of Chronicles, the record states (margin) that God wrought a miracle and healed him. If it was a miracle it was not a case of healing by remedies. A miracle is something performed by Almighty power when the case is an impossible one.
3. The figs were merely a sign to help his faith to rise from the natural to the supernatural, just as the oil of anointing is a sign of the touch of the Holy Spirit, but has not in itself any inherent healing power. It is mentioned in verses 21, 22, as a “sign.”
4. We have an interesting account of Hezekiah’s states of mind during the time that he was waiting under the Lord’s hand for the message of healing. At first he completely sank in dejection and despair, and the prayer which the Spirit has recorded is a very weak and miserable failure, not unlike some of our wretched wailing when trouble comes to us. Listen to this, “I reckoned until morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones; from day even to night you will make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: my eyes fail with looking upward.” How it reminds us of some of our chattering and mourning, but at last he reaches a turn in the dark road of doubt and fear and suddenly exclaims, “Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me.” No sooner has this gasp of honest prayer reached the heart of God than a marvelous revelation comes to him and we hear him exclaim, “what shall I say? He has both spoken to me and Himself has done it.” He has heard the voice of God and his faith has answered back and lo! the night is passed and dawn has broken upon his despair.
5. How tender, subdued and inspiring is his note of praise. “The living, the living, he shall praise You, I shall go softly all my days, my years.”
6. But, at last Hezekiah forgot God’s great mercy and “rendered not again according to the benefit received,” and in later years God’s chastening hand fell upon him once more because of vainglory and sinful pride.

Oh, how sacred a trust the Lord's healing is! Let us not forget that the life He has redeemed belongs to Him and must be given back in humble, loving and devoted service.

Finally, in Isaiah 27: 1, we have the binding of Satan, described so vividly in Rev. 20: 1-3: "In that day the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan, the piercing serpent, even leviathan, that crooked serpent: and He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." Then comes the reign of Israel through the millennial years, Isaiah 27: 6: "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." In the later chapters of Isaiah very many of the visions concerning Judah and Jerusalem belong to the millennial age. Isaiah 35: 10, is one of these. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." So is Isaiah 59: 20: "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, says the Lord." The whole of the sixtieth chapter belongs to this glorious time. So also Isaiah 65: 17-25: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more then an infant of days, nor an old man that has not filled his days; for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat; for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and my elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer: and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord." And Isaiah 66: 18-23: "For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, says the Lord. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, says the Lord."

Only the fulfillment of these glorious passages can bring their full interpretation. We can complete the broken links in Isaiah's imperfect chain from the writings of Daniel and John, and the prophetic messages from the Master Himself. No other key will solve Isaiah's vision but the coming of the Lord, the restoration of Israel, the millennial reign of Christ and the glorious realities of the blessed hope which has grown so much clearer and nearer in the light of the New Testament and the events in the days in which we live. When that glorious day shall come Isaiah's splendid songs and visions of

glory shall have a significance and a grandeur, which even he but dimly comprehended when he wrote as the apostle expresses it “searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.”

Chapter 26 – The “Fear Nots” of Isaiah

This little message “fear not” is almost one of the keynotes of Isaiah. The chord of his later messages was struck in the opening of the fortieth chapter by the words, “Comfort, comfort My people,” and in keeping with this message He again and again reassures His troubled people in these words of comfort and encouragement, “Fear not.”

We find the phrase in five passages and repeated several times in some of them.

I. Isaiah 41: 10-14. “Fear not; for I am with you, be not dismayed; for I am your God: I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness.

“Behold, all they that were incensed against you shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with you shall perish.

“You shall seek them and shall not find them, even them that contended with you: they that war against you shall be as nothing and as a thing of nought.

“For I the Lord your God will hold your right hand, saying unto you, Fear not; I will help you.”

“Fear not, you worm Jacob and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the Lord, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

Three times the words “fear not” are repeated in this passage and five reasons are given why we should not fear.

1. The first is God’s presence with us: “Fear not for I am with you.” His companionship under all circumstances and in all places guarantees our safety and may well charm away our fears.

2. God’s relation to us as our God: “Be not dismayed, for I am your God.” He gives Himself to us. He gives us the right to use Him against every possible need in His infinite resources. What need we fear with such a God?

3. The strength He promises to give us. “I will strengthen you.” That is actual imparted strength to us. This comes in connection with the reassurance, “Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you feeble men of Israel.” It stands over against their unworthiness and weakness. Jacob was indeed a worm and Israel was weak, but God says, “I will strengthen you.”

4. His promise of help. “Yes, I will help you.” Not only does He give us actual strength but He adds His strength to us. This is very much more.

5. His upholding. “Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness.” This is more than strength, more than help. It is God undertaking the entire responsibility of our case. Our strength will fail; even His help will be insufficient for when God only helps us and we stand in front responsible

for the conflict, we shall not be sufficient. But there comes a time when we completely fail and fall into His almighty hand and then He takes us up bodily and carries us altogether and it is no longer a man doing his best and God helping him, but God all in all and the man letting Him be all.

In this paragraph there is a beautiful reassurance: “I will hold your right hand, saying to you,” or more literally, “I will keep saying to you.” It is not enough for Him to say it once. We need to hear it over and over again and He never tires saying it to His troubled children until He has cheered away all our fears and sorrows.

II. Isaiah 43: 1-7. “But now this says the Lord that created you, O Jacob, and He that formed you, O Israel, fear not; for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are Mine.

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you.

“For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior: I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for you.

“Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable and I have loved you: therefore will I give men for you and people for your life.

“Fear not: for I am with you: I will bring your seed from the east and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth; even everyone that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yes, I have made him.”

Here is a new group of fear nots and new reasons for our confidence.

1. “I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are Mine.” The fact that He has purchased us with the precious blood of Christ should be enough to guarantee every other blessing we need. “He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things.” After Calvary, anything. Then He says, “You are Mine.” We are His property and He will take care of His property. It is His interest even more than ours to guard and bless us.

2. He promises to go with us through the waters and the fires. It is in the dark hour that we know His consolations. That hour will surely come and come often; but it will give us cause to say, “You have known my soul in adversities.” Indeed, we are often most truly happy in such trying hours, for God’s consolation more than outweighs the pressure of our troubles.

3. God’s love to us and sacrifices for us. “Since you were precious in My eyes, you have been honorable and I have loved you; therefore will I give men for you and people for your life.” There is something inexpressibly tender about these words. God loves us with a jealous love that puts everything aside that would hurt us or hinder us. There is a suggestion here of the infinite pains and trouble that He has had with us, and after all this, He is not likely to fail us. Therefore we should not fear, for nothing can work against His will.

4. He promises spiritual fruit. Whatever our troubles may be, it is an infinite comfort if they are overruled for His glory and the good of men. He tells us here that He will bring our seed to the north and south and east and west and that the fruit of our life shall not be permitted to fail. The seed we sow may seem to perish, but we shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us!

III. Isaiah 44: 1-5. "Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: This says the Lord that made you and formed you from the womb, which will help you; Fear not, O Jacob, My servant: and you, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.

"For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon your seed, and My blessing upon your offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.

"One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Here He comforts His troubled children by the promise of a great spiritual blessing and a widespread and lasting revival. He will pour out His Spirit upon the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. He will revive His languishing cause and make the drooping plants of grace to spring up like grass and like willows by the water courses. He will send the comforting power of His grace so that here and there one shall say, "I am the Lord's" and another shall confess His name and unite himself with his people, and the third shall rise to high blessing and enter into deeper covenant with God and call himself by the higher name of Israel.

The Holy Spirit is the best antidote to our fears and when He comes all the interests of His good cause are safe and all fears are turned to rejoicing and thanksgiving.

IV. Isaiah 51: 12, 13. "I, even I, am He that comforts you: who are you that you should be afraid of a man that shall die and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forget the Lord your Maker, that has stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?"

This passage shows us the sin of fear. It is an act of unbelief. It leads us to forget the Lord, our Maker. It comes from not remembering His power and faithfulness. All our depressions and discouragements are direct reflections upon Him who has always loved and cared for us. We are also reminded in this passage of the folly of our fears. "Who are you that you shall be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass and has feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, and where is the fury of the oppressor?" How very empty are all our anxious cares. How many things we allow to worry us that really never come to pass. How sad and needless the waste of life through such foolish frets and fears.

V. Isaiah 54: 4-17.

Four great reasons are given in this splendid passage why God's trusting children should not fear.

1. His tender personal relation to them. "Your Maker is your Husband: the Lord of hosts is His name,

the God of the whole earth shall He be called.” This figure of the marriage relation was familiar in all ancient religions, but it was polluted by the grossest abuses. God purifies it and lifts it up to the highest spiritual meaning. There is no suggestion of physical coarseness. It is merely the love of the husband to the wife and the love of the bride that are expressed in the divine marriage. But there is such a love, intense, tender and peculiar which God recognizes in His more intimate relations to His consecrated people and that fellowship and that love guarantee all possible blessings and safeguards. The husband cherishes his wife even at the cost of his own life and the love of a true wife is stronger than death. How infinitely condescending it is on the part of God to stoop to such a fellowship with mortal and sinful beings and with such a love how little cause have we to fear.

2. His covenant and oath. “I have sworn,” He says, “that I will not be wroth with you nor rebuke you.” There is a reference here to the covenant made with Noah of which the rainbow was the symbol and the seal, and God tells us with equal certainty that He has sworn to His eternal love to Israel. But these great promises are not exclusively the property of Israel any more than the epistles to the Ephesians and Galatians belong exclusively to those churches. God spoke through His ancient people to every heart in every language, that can still appropriate His promises, and this is true for you and me if we will claim it and live up to it. Many Christians are constantly under the law and they look to God as though they ever expected a frown and a blow. Rather, we should live in such perfect love that we could not even imagine His failing or forgetting us. There are some human friendships that have never had a cloud upon them. It is very beautiful to have a love that never was shaken. This is the love that God wants us to have to Him. There is a suggestion here of a time when there was a cloud. “In a little wrath I hid My face from you; for a small moment have I forsaken you.” But this is all over now since Christ has died for us and God is ever striving by His great love to make us forget that there ever was such a thing as sin between His heart and ours. Beloved, have we been wholly delivered from the law and are we living in His perfect love that casts out fear?

3. He promises us His protecting care. “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn.” There shall be enemies. There shall be temptations and trials, but God will protect us, preserve and vindicate us and we need fear no foe if we are trusting in Him. “Who is he that will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?”

4. Finally He promises us His own righteousness. He does not vindicate us and protect us because we are worthy. Let us not flatter ourselves with any self-righteousness. “Their righteousness is of Me, says the Lord.” This is the mystery of His love; that He treats us as if we were faultless although we are full of blame. He accepts us in Jesus Christ, His beloved Son, clothes us with His imputed righteousness and treats us and loves us as if we were as perfect and faultless as He. What need we fear with such a defense? “If God be for us, who can be against us? Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies.”

Such are some of the “fear nots” of Isaiah. Let us add one or two concluding considerations to save us from our fears.

I. It will help us to remember that the devil’s fears are always falsehoods. If fear comes from Satan, then we may invariably conclude that there is nothing to fear, because his suggestions are always lies,

and if lies, they cannot harm.

2. Fear is dangerous. It turns into fact the things we fear. It creates the evil just as faith creates the good. "I feared a fear and it came upon me," is the solemn warning of Job. Let us therefore be afraid of our fears lest they should become our worst foes.

3. The remedy for fear is faith and love. "What time I am afraid I will trust in You." "Perfect love casts out fear." "Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we also in this world."

Beloved, let us no longer dishonor Him by our doubts and fears but trust Him and honor Him by our confidence, even when everything is most dark and trying. Very beautiful was the answer of that grand old sea captain, who so long commanded a stately ship on the coast line service of the Atlantic. In a violent storm off Hatteras, a trembling woman hastened up to him on the rocking deck and the spray-swept bridge and asked, "Is there any fear, captain?" "No," he replied ; "no fear, but there is considerable danger." There was peril, but no doubt or anxious care; and when he came through that danger through the providence of God, he could witness that God was able to keep in perfect peace.

Chapter 27 – Four Awakenings

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are You not He that has cut Rahab and wounded the dragons?” (Is. 51: 9.)

This sublime passage is a call from Jerusalem to Jehovah to awake as in the might of ancient days for her defense. and deliverance. It seemed to her that He must be asleep, so long had He appeared to be deaf to her cries and silent to her prayers.

So the disciples thought the Master cared not for them, as He lay “in the hinder part of the ship asleep on a pillow,” but the heart that was unmoved by the raging of the storm instantly responded to the faintest cry of their distress and woke to rebuke the storm and speak their hearts to peace.

And so God was not asleep. It was but the suppressed strength of His waiting and longsuffering love, and it grew by waiting, and would at length burst forth as “the cry of a travailing woman,” rending the heavens, making the mountains to flow down at His command and overcoming all His people’s foes.

I. “Awake, awake, stand up, oh Jerusalem, which has drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling and wrung them out.” (Isaiah 51: 17).

The second passage quoted above is in answer to the first call. It is a summons from Jehovah to Jerusalem to wake. He turns her own question back upon her and cries out, “Awake, awake, oh Jerusalem.” Like the disciples in the garden, she has been “sleeping for sorrow.”

Yes, it is true that the heart can be drugged by grief and anguish until the fiber of our being is poisoned and paralyzed with sorrow.

Not always is suffering sanctifying. Suffering without faith, love and hope corrodes every fiber of the soul, depresses, discourages and destroys. There is nothing on earth so tragic as the case of those who weep life’s bitterest tears in unavailing grief, who get nothing out of their distress but bitterness, despair and at last self-destruction; turning first against God and man and then at last, like the scorpion that stings itself to death, against themselves. Thousands of people are going wrong and going down just through heart break and discouragement. They say “there is no hope,” and they go on from worse to worse. Oh, if you are sunk in the stupor or sleep of hopeless sorrow, hear the voice of God calling “Awake, awake.” Rise up above the hideous nightmare of your gloom, throw off the spell of Satan’s hate and go forth into the clear light of truth and God, and lo! you will find that it was but a nightmare of your heart and brain and the sun is shining around you in the heavens, the birds are singing in the branches and there is still left to you the love of God, the sweetness of life and the hope of a bright tomorrow. Awake, awake — from the sleep of despairing sorrow. God lives. Christ loves and there is a whole heaven waiting for every heart that can receive it.

III. “Awake, awake; put on your strength, oh Zion; put on your beautiful garments, oh Jerusalem, the holy city; shake yourself from the dust; arise, and sit down, oh Jerusalem; loose yourself from the bands of your neck, oh captive daughter of Zion.” (Isa. 52: 1, 2).

The third passage in our series is another call to Zion to wake, this time not from sorrow. There is a hideous sight that we sometimes behold in our great cities: a wretched woman who has fallen in the streets under the power of drunkenness and vice. Her hair is matted; her garments are dishevelled and spattered with the mire of the street and her whole frame is bound by the fearful fetters of long habits of sin. Once she was innocent and beautiful and happy, but oh, how degraded now — and as you gaze upon her with compassion, you summon her to awake, to put on her strength, to change her garments, to shake herself from the dust and then to loose herself from the bands of sin and rise and sit down once more in her womanly dignity and glory.

Thank God, many a fallen one has thus risen and is “sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” There are several clauses here:

1. “Awake.”

The figure of slumber is often used, not only for the sinner, but for the Christian and the church. The condition of sleep is one in which we are blind to the conditions around us. The flames may be creeping through our home, the burglar may be stealing our treasures, the frowning cliff may be yawning just beneath our feet, but we are asleep and we see it not. The fact that you are indifferent or unconcerned about your soul is no evidence that you are safe, but rather that you are asleep.

Then again, the sleeper lives in an unreal world. The thoughts that come to him are vain dreams and false visions of unreal things while the world is going on around him, and he knows nothing about it. Thousands of people are living as in a dream, passionately striving for the vain things of this little day which will soon vanish and be forgotten, while the great realities of time and eternity are to them as dreams.

Oh, you that are living in a false world and for the perishing things of time, awake, awake!

Again, sleep is a condition of idleness and ease. Your girdle is laid down. Your work is put aside and you are doing nothing in the activities of life. Thousands of God’s children are idle because they are asleep. The cause of the Master needs them. The claims of the work need them. The great interests of eternity need them, but they are asleep.

The sleeper is defenseless and exposed to the attacks of the enemy. It is when you sleep that the thief comes to steal your property. It was “while men slept the enemy sowed tares in the field.” It was while he slept that Bunyan’s pilgrim lost his roll and had to go back afterwards and spend long and weary hours in recovering what he had lost.

How many opportunities have been lost by sleep? How pathetic the appeal of Christ to His three disciples, “Tarry and watch with Me,” and how touching His reproach afterwards when He found them sleeping. “What, could you not watch with Me one hour?” And how unspeakably mournful His final words to them as He came back at last, spent with agony and treading the winepress alone, and said, “Sleep on now and take your rest.” It is too late to help Me. You have lost your opportunity. “The Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”

Oh, children of God, how much you are missing! Souls are perishing. Opportunities are going by.

Eternal recompense is being lost while you sleep on in your dull and stupid insensibility. Awake, awake!

When a Roman sentinel slept at his post, he lost his uniform and was publicly dishonored and disgraced. It is to this the Master refers when He says,

“Blessed is he that watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” (Rev. 16: 15.)

God’s awakening call is a very loud and repeated one. Not gently does the summons come when it is necessary that we shall be wakened. This is the meaning of the alarms that have been rung in your heart and your life, the blows that have struck you in your home, your business and your own person. God is calling you. Oh, awake, before He shall have to call so loudly that you will never forget the shock!

2. “Put on your strength.”

Sometimes we go to sleep from weakness and weariness. God is calling us to rise and let Him clothe us with His strength. This is not inherent strength of our own. It is a strength that we put on. It is the robe of fire with which the Holy Ghost is waiting to endue every willing, consecrated soul. Oh, the weakness of Christians, afraid of their own voices, afraid of the faces of men, conscious of their impotence and inefficiency, unable to speak to a soul, unable to pray a prevailing prayer, unfruitful and passing on to judgment with “nothing but leaves” to bring before the Master.

God has provided for our strength. The Spirit of Pentecost is waiting to come upon every willing heart. He will give you power to pray, power to witness, power to live, power to bring things to pass for His cause and the world’s need. God wants no imbeciles or invalids in His army. You have no business to be a baby. “Awake, awake, put on your strength.” Receive the Holy Ghost.

3. “Put on your beautiful garments.”

This refers to the robes of purity and practical righteousness. The Holy Ghost is given us, not merely for power, but for all the help we need to live pure, sweet victorious lives. We have no more business to be wicked than we have to be weak. We have no business to go on sinning and failing. We have no business to go into the wedding feast, not having the wedding garment on. It is all provided, and we have but to be willing to wear His robes of purity and He will put them on us. The question is: will you choose to be sweet, to be kind, to be holy, instead of indulging yourself in your temper, your irritation, your hasty word of retaliation. The Holy Spirit will give you all the grace, all the love, all the patience you are willing to wear. You must take it by faith and then wait to put it on and prove it in the real tests of actual life and in the hard places where your human nature will break down and His divine grace will come to triumph.

This expression covers more than a mere ordinary experience of holiness. These beautiful garments include the finer touches of grace, the finishing touches of holy character, the beautiful array which the bride is to wear in order to be ready for the coming of her Lord.

Shall we awake and put on our strength and our beautiful garments?

4. “Shake yourself from the dust.”

Every woman knows how to shake the dust from her robes when she has been sitting in an open car or by some dusty highway. The dust here refers to the entanglements with the world into which the children of God so often fall. John Bunyan describes it by the picture of a muck rake with which the miserable worldling was raking together all the dust and grime of the roadside for the sake of the little bits of shining gold he found among it, while at the same time he was refusing a golden crown which the hand of an angel was holding out to him from above.

Yes, “the thick clay,” as Job expresses it, is all over us. Go into a fashionable church and angel eyes can see it upon the clothes of the vain and frivolous women, who are thinking much more about their array than about the Word of God. Or, look a little deeper behind the waistcoats of the men and you will see hearts filled with the plans of the week’s business and the cares of this sordid world, and all higher thoughts shut out by mammon.

God calls us to shake ourselves from all these things; to be separated from the world and only to use it as a servant and instrument for His glory, counting all our means and possessions as His property and spending them as stewards for His service and glory. The only way to be saved from the world is to give everything to Christ and then to administer the trust as His servants and stewards.

5. “Loose yourself from the bands of your neck.” We are fettered. We are bound. Sometimes it is by the fear of men; sometimes it is by the power of evil habits; sometimes it is by the restraining hand of sickness; but God bids us claim our freedom and stand forth in the glorious liberty of the children of God. We must loose ourselves. He has set us free. We have but to assert our liberty and we shall be free.

6. “Sit down.”

This speaks of rest and quietness and peace. She is first to rise from her prostrate and helpless condition and then sit down as a queen on her royal seat. Our place is to “sit with Christ in the heavenlies,” in the “peace that passes all understanding,” and the rest which quiets every anxious care and fits us to bless and help the troubled hearts around us.

Have we entered into His rest? Have we “sat down under His shadow with great delight”? Have we taken our place of blessing and privilege and “entered into rest”?

IV. “Arise, shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.” (Is. 60: 1.)

The splendid figure here is that of one sleeping after sunrise. The sun is up, the light is come, the glory of the Lord has risen, but we are still sleeping as if it were night and His voice bids us rise, step out into the light that is filling all the earth and heaven and shine in its radiance for His glory.

This applies to the people that are waiting for salvation instead of rising and claiming the salvation which has come and is awaiting their acceptance. This applies also to the people that are waiting for

the Holy Ghost instead of recognizing the fact that the Spirit has come and that it is ours to receive Him, count upon Him and to go forth and act in dependence upon His presence and victorious power.

And this applies to all who are living below their privileges; who are waiting for some great thing to come to them instead of recognizing that God has given us everything and that He is waiting for us to step out and enter into our full inheritance. This word “glory” stands for the highest and the best that God has for His children. It is more than the ordinary grace which saves us. It is “the life more abundantly,” it is the “joy unspeakable which is full of glory,” it is “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” It is for us here and now.

“The glory that You have given Me I have given them that they may be one even as we are.”

God is waiting to come into your life with a touch of sublimity that will transfigure the common things into the sunlit mountain tops of a celestial vision. It does not mean that our lives shall be on some high plane of circumstances and earthly conditions. Just as the sun can light up a little bit of glass till it glows like a diamond; just as the windows of yonder village sometimes blaze like celestial palaces when the rays of the setting sun fall upon them at a distance, so the commonest trials and duties of life grow elevated when touched by the grace of God and the victory of faith and love.

The other day Mrs. Alexander told in Albert Hall how a few nights before, as she talked with a besotted woman and told her of the love of God, that wretched being asked her if she loved her well enough to kiss her. For a moment she shrank from the new experience, but there came such a tide of God’s love into her heart that she leaned over and kissed those foul lips and said, “Yes, I will kiss you, because God loves you,” and then she told how that woman, begrimed and defiled with every kind of sin, broke down and gave her life to God, and is now working in the meetings, bringing others to the Savior. What a touch of glory that little thing shed upon a very simple act.

And sometimes we have seen God come to some quiet Christian in the hour of overwhelming sorrow when others were crushed in despair, and yet this child of faith was enabled to rise up with face illumined and eyes that refused to weep and lips that could only praise until all that watched wondered at the glory of His grace.

Yes, and sometimes, too, we have seen a modest, quiet Christian, after a life unmarked by religious emotion or any great experience, but filled up with simple duties, patient suffering and faithful service, — we have seen such a life pass down into the dark valley, and we have wondered perhaps if there was a deep enough experience for that last great test; and lo! the heavens have opened, the glory of God has shone upon that dying bed and those lips have been opened to utter words of inspiration and revelation, words of peace, words of triumph, words of unutterable joy, words of sweet and solemn warning to the living, words of power in the Holy Ghost and that chamber of mourning has become like a mount of transfiguration, and we have said,

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“Is that a deathbed where a Christian dies?”

Yes, but not his; ’tis Death himself that dies.”

Beloved, this glory is for you and for me; oceans of it, ages of it are waiting for us yonder, but God will anticipate the eternal years and give us an earnest of it now. Shall we take it? Shall we rise and shine, for our light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon us?

“Shine on, shine on,

You children of the light, shine on;

Shine as the beacon light,

Shine as the sunrise bright,

Shine as the children of the light, shine on, shine on.”

Chapter 28 – The Mystery of Prayer

What does Isaiah teach us about prayer?

I. That God is the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. “Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry and He will say: Here I am.” (Isa. 58: 9). “And it will come to pass that before they call, I will answer: and while they are yet speaking I will hear.” (Is. 65: 24.)

These verses assure us that our God is no isolated despot, indifferent to the needs and conditions of His creatures, but a loving Father, sensitive to every want and sorrow of His suffering children. How beautiful these promises of prayer! First He says He will answer. Then not only will He answer, but He will come. “He Will say, Here I am.” Next, “Before they call I will answer,” He tells us, and “while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Not only will He wait and listen to our appeal, but He will anticipate our need and put the prayer Himself upon our hearts or send the blessing before we ask it. How beautifully this is illustrated in the Savior’s thoughtful love towards Simon Peter. Fretting about their taxes which Peter had not the means to pay, we are told that the Lord

“prevented him” and sent him down to the sea to find the fish with the golden coin in its mouth and then to bring it and pay the claim for Him and them. He did not wait for Peter to ask for it. He did not allow him to be embarrassed, but His loving forethought anticipated the need. So He is ever loving and caring for us, and as the Psalmist expresses it, “You prevent us with the blessings of goodness.”

The last of these promises, “While they are yet speaking, I will hear,” finds a striking illustration in the message of God to Daniel during his long fast and prayer. “At the beginning of your message and supplication,” the angel says,

“the commandment came forth.” God does not wait until we have teased or coaxed Him into compliance with our wishes, but the answer comes with the prayer, and it is our privilege to believe that when we ask we do receive the things for which we pray. Indeed, prayer is as much a receiving as an asking, and in the very exercise of our communion with heaven, our hearts are comforted and filled and the blessing comes while we wait.

II. Isaiah teaches us that prayer has its hindrances as well as its encouragements. The first of these is sin. “Behold the Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear. God cannot recognize sin or hear us if we regard iniquity in our hearts. A willful indulgence in and tolerance of sin destroys every feeling of confidence and renders it impossible for us truly to pray. Let us see to it that every forbidden and doubtful thing is put aside, and “if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

Indolence is also a hindrance to prayer. “And there is none that calls upon Your name, that stirs up himself to take hold of You: for You have hid Your face from us and have consumed us because of our

iniquities.” Prayer is recognized here as an intense and active energy of the soul. It is called in James “the effectual fervent prayer,” which has real force in it. Many of us are too easy, too self-complacent and contented to know much of the power of prayer. It means the waking up of all our being and the intense earnestness of our spirit in pressing through difficulties to God and fighting the good fight of faith with perseverance and power. We often misinterpret the incident of Jacob at Peniel as though the wrestling were all by the angel. It is true that the angel was wrestling with Jacob, to break down his self-sufficiency and subdue his carnal strength, but Jacob was wrestling with the angel, too, and crying out, “I will not let you go except you bless me.” Both experiences are true. Each has its place and the truth lies between the two extremes of passive waiting for God and active taking hold of God and stirring up ourselves in the victorious conflict of prevailing prayer. There is no such intense exercise of soul as real prayer, and it wakes up every dormant faculty of our being and puts us in the place where God can pour His life into us and use us as the instruments of His power.

III. The great object-lesson of prayer.

Isaiah gives a picture of the great Intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ. “And He saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him and His righteousness, it sustained Him.” Here we find our great High Priest entering upon His mighty ministry of intercession and a little later, in Isaiah 62:1, we hear Him devoting Himself to the long conflict which was not to cease until Zion’s deliverance was complete. “For Zion’s sake will I not hold My peace and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns.” Have we duly considered that the supreme ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is prayer? He spent three and onehalf years in active work and suffering, but He has spent nineteen hundred years in intercession for His people. What a significance, what a majesty, what a power, this gives to the ministry of prayer! The reason is that the spiritual creation is not like the natural. The worlds of space are made by the hand of God, but the church is born of His heart. He had but to put forth a single command and the sun and stars sprang into being, but before a soul can be restored to His image and the work of redemption be consummated, His own heart has to travail in birth in agonies of love, and one by one each of us has to come forth from His very being born of love travail and pain. This is the ministry that Christ is carrying on. Therefore, it comes to pass that prayer is the secret force of everything in the spiritual kingdom. This great ministry of prayer begins in the bosom of Jesus, but is by Him transferred through the Holy Ghost to the heart of His church and carried on by us in the ministry of prayer on earth.

IV. This brings us to the conflict of prayer.

“I have set watchmen upon your walls O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: you that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give Him no rest until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” (Isa. 62: 6, 7.) Here we find the same language employed by Christ in the first verse reechoed by His people. His prayer is passed on to us and by us passed back to Him. Like His, our conflict is to be deep and long. We are to “keep not silence and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”

Why this unceasing prayer? Why cannot we ask and then believe it has come and change our prayer to praise? Because it is through the very agency of prayer that the forces are set in motion which accomplish the answer. Natural science tells us that all the effects of light, heat and sound are

produced by constant motion in the atoms and elements of matter. The ether is in intense vibration, and forth from this come the blue sky of heaven, the tinted clouds, the glorious sunshine, the harmonies of music, the waves of heat. Look through a microscope at a drop of water and you will behold every particle and atom in constant circulation moving and moving evermore, and as it moves, developing into new forms of life, the very movement is the process of each new development. So it is in spiritual activity that God works. The stagnant heart is like a corpse or a cemetery. It is the active, intense cooperating spirit through whom He works and moves. Prayer, therefore, is that spiritual law of the fitness of things which puts our spirit in touch with the activities of the Holy Ghost. Prayer, therefore, is an actual force in the spiritual world. It not only moves God, but it moves things.

Science tells us how a single chord of music prolonged without cessation will crumble to dust a stone wall. The old myth of the fiddler fiddling down the bridge is not a fancy. There are musical chords which, if sustained, will break to pieces the strongest material forms. Therefore, passing through the Alps, every voice is hushed, a single sound would dislodge the avalanche and hurl it upon the traveler's head.

So in the spiritual world prayer is a potency that shakes the foundations of the kingdoms of darkness, that moves the hearts of men and that works out the will of God.

Oh, praying ones, ring out the bells, prolong the notes, let the trumpets resound around the walls of Jericho and they will surely fall. This is the prayer of which the Master speaks when he says, "Knock and it shall be opened." If we let Him teach us this mystery and ministry of spiritual power, then indeed shall the weapons of our warfare be mighty, pulling down strongholds and fulfilling God's majestic promise, "Call unto Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you knew not."

V. The confidence of prayer. "This says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker; ask Me of things to come concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands command you Me." Prayer is here connected with the vision of God's plan for His people and His work. First we are to ask of things concerning His sons. We are to look to Him for a revelation of His purpose for His work and the world. God does give such visions of faith to waking souls. He does forecast the things He is waiting to do for us and then He bids us claim its actual fulfillment, and adds this mighty command: "Concerning the work of My hands, command you Me." In the name of Jesus we are to not only ask, but claim and pass in the orders of faith to the bank of heaven. The Master Himself has said, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will," or, as one has translated it, "You shall ask what you command," "and it shall be done unto you."

This is a very high place to give to prayer, but we may take it in fellowship with Jesus.

"Fear not to take your place with Jesus on the throne,

And bid the powers of earth and hell His sovereign scepter own;
Your full redemption rights with holy boldness claim,

And to His utmost fulness prove the power of Jesus' name."

VI. The communion of prayer.

“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.” (Isa. 40: 31.)

This is not the prayer that asks for things, but silently receives from Him His life and strength until the spirit soars with eagle’s wings and then goes forth

“to run and not be weary and to walk and not faint.” This is the kind of prayer that comforts the sorrowing, rests the weary, refreshes the thirsty soul and brings heaven down to fill our hearts here below. It is the fellowship of prayer; the silence of prayer; the secret place of the Most High. Happy they who have found the key and learned the secret and whose life is “hid with Christ in God.”

VII. The sinner’s prayer. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

This is the only prayer which the sinner may offer. All other prayers are useless until we begin here. God does not want your worship, your ceremonies, your many prayers. There is but one prayer for you, and that is,

“Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.” Bring the prayer of the penitent sinner, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Until you offer that, all your other prayers are vain. Not until you accept the Savior and come to God in His name can you worship Him acceptably and pray effectually.

Come, therefore, in penitence for mercy and salvation and enter in through the door, and then you shall have access to the Father’s house and all the privileges and promises of the throne of grace. But come now, while He is near. Seek Him at once, while He may be found. Do not put aside the gentle hand that is touching your shoulder. Do not refuse to grasp the silken cord that is dropped down to you from heaven, and if you seize it, has power to lift you to the skies. Do not trifle with the impressions that God has given you, for impressions are solemn things, but meet the touch that is drawing you to Him; answer to the call which is breathing on your heart; pray the prayer which He has prescribed for such as you and you will find that “He will have mercy upon you and abundantly pardon,” and He will lead you on to those higher ministries of prayer which will enable you to give to others the blessing that has made God so real to you.

“Lord, teach us to pray.”